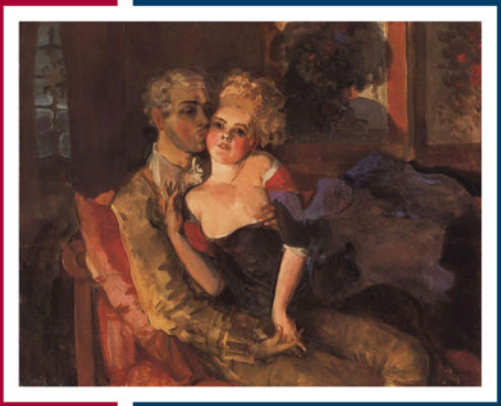
Libertinage in Russian Culture and Literature

A Bio-History of Sexualities at the Threshold of Modernity

Alexei Lalo



BRILL

RUSSIAN HISTORY & CULTURE

Libertinage in Russian Culture and Literature

Russian History and Culture

VOLUME 8

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A Bio-History of Sexualities at the Threshold of Modernity

By
Alexei Lalo

BRILL

LEIDEN · BOSTON
2011

Cover illustration: *Vlyublyonnye* (The Lovers), by Konstantin Somov, 1910.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lalo, Alexei.
Libertinage in Russian culture and literature : a bio-history of sexualities at the threshold of modernity / by Alexei Lalo.
p. cm. — (Russian history and culture, ISSN 1877-7791 ; v. 8)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-90-04-21119-3 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Russian literature—19th century—History and criticism. 2. Russian literature—20th century—History and criticism. 3. Libertines in literature. 4. Modernism (Literature) I. Title. II. Series.

PG3011.L27 2011
891.7'09358—dc23

2011028623

ISSN 1877-7791
ISBN 978 90 04 21119 3

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To Professor Igor S. Kon (1928–2011)
who pioneered sexology in Russia.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I must express my enormous gratitude to Katherine Arens, my adviser and mentor at the University of Texas at Austin, for guiding me through different stages of the project and improving the outcome in so many ways.

My friend and colleague Nikolai Shchitov of the Far Eastern National University in Vladivostok has offered his invaluable pieces of advice over the years on different parts of the text helping me in formulating many of the arguments made in this study and finding new directions for developing it.

I would like to wholeheartedly thank my senior colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin who have helped me to work on this study: Brian Bremen, Craig Cravens, Michael Pesenson, Gilbert Rappaport, Nicholas Shumway, Janet Swaffar, and Charters Wynn.

Special warm thanks go to Cynthia Buckley and Mary Neuburger of the UT-Austin Department for Slavic and Eurasian Studies for kindly supporting me and my work.

The book incorporates, in a modified form, the following articles, either previously published or forthcoming:

"Sexuality in *The Tale of Golden Cockerel* and the Tradition of Russian Anti-Utopianism." *Ulbandus, The Slavic Review of Columbia University* 12 (2009/2010): "Pushkin." 105–118.

"Exploring the Impetus of Russia's Silver Age: Representations of Sexuality and Eroticism in Aleksandr Kuprin, Ivan Bunin and Georgii Ivanov." *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 31 (Spring 2010). http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/31/lalo31.shtml

"Sexuality and Eroticism in Joseph Brodsky's Poetry: Linguistic and Thematic Peculiarities" *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 35 (Winter 2011) http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq

" 'Rules of Attraction' in Nabokov's *Lolita*: Sexual Portraits of Main Characters and their Slavic Pedigree" (accepted by *Nabokov Online Journal* www.nabokovonline.com).

"Carnality and Eroticism in the History of Russian Literature: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse of Silence." *TranscUlturAl* vol. 1, (4) 2011, 8–30. http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/TC/issue/view/556/showToc

Alexei Lalo, UT-Austin

INTRODUCTION

APPROACHING RUSSIAN SILENCES AND BURLESQUES

Setting out the Problem

At least since the path-breaking work of Michel Foucault on the *History of Sexuality* (1976–1984), the fact that images and discourses of sexuality are socially and culturally constructed has been a commonplace of scholarly work. The present study aims to take up the case of sexuality in Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to explore a still largely misunderstood site of such cultural construction and the literary discourses that are its legacy.

The literary discourses about sexuality found in Russia in the era are dichotomous. On the one hand, there is a literature characterized by overt eroticism, often burlesque in quality—a literature that may reach back to folk traditions. On the other, another literature (most familiar from Leo Tolstoy)[1] very much resembles the Victorian challenges discussed by Peter Gay in *Education of the Senses. The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (1984), in which silences mask intensely erotic moments. Where Gay argued that the Western European bourgeoisie actually had a well-developed, if private, vocabulary for erotic experience, however, I will argue that nineteenth-century and modern Russian literature and culture are characterized by an almost complete absence of vocabulary for dealing with erotic life within social contexts.

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[1] The choice of authors to be discussed in the monograph is not merely arbitrary or based on taste judgment. If I have chosen to dwell on Dostoevsky, Tolstoy or Chekhov rather than some other authors of the second half of the nineteenth century, this is justifiable by these cultural heavyweights' omnipresence in Russian culture—throughout the formative years of most children and young adults for instance, when these authors are central to school and university curricula. Other authors to be discussed, such as Rozanov and Nabokov, used to be silenced in the Soviet period but now are widely published and thoroughly studied. It makes sense to focus on authors whose grip on the Russian mind has been unfaltering (inside Russia and/or in the émigré circles) and whose international, global reputation and quotation indexes are equally prominent.

One of the conscious limits of this study is that it is concentrated on prose discourses rather than on poetry (although some poetic works of Pushkin, Blok, Ivanov are touched upon; the last chapter is on Brodsky's poetry). In addition, audiovisual arts including film and music have largely been left out of this project.

This assertion may seem surprising, given Russian literature's clear reliance on Western exemplars, particularly French novels, in the era under question, but I will substantiate the claim by reference both to the cultural-historical facts of the discourses of sexuality available in the age (defined in Foucauldian terms), and to the documented reception of key texts in the religious, philosophical, legal, and medical discourses from the Silver Age of Russian culture (1890–1917) in later texts, up through the Soviet era. That is, this manuscript will combine historical and literary perspectives to show that this founding era of Russian "realism" was actually transacting a more complicated network of social-political concerns than is often imputed to it.

Foucault's analysis of French, predominantly Catholic, culture includes an argument about the evolution of confession techniques in the Catholic Church into the discourses of sexology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis toward the end of the nineteenth century. In his account, this shift is directly related to the development of literary discourses of the erotic body: "confession is not a way of getting around a rule of silence . . . confession and freedom of expression face each other and complement each other" (*Abnormal* 170). In Russia, this principle of subjects as *communicating vessels* allowing for a transition of discourses between literature and religious/sexological discourses simply could not operate in the same way because the dominant Russian Orthodox Church did not develop any analog to Catholic confession—Russia lacks exemplars for narratives of the forbidden, and the culture of guilt, shame, and atonement that went with the confrontations between body and soul that so occupied Catholic clerics. Exchanges of ideas about the corporeal and its moral status that should have taken place between artists, literati and intellectuals on the one side and religious folk / *народ* on the other were therefore limited to the former's fascination with the often bizarre sexual practices of such popular sects as the Khlysty, Beguny, Skoptsy, etc. that proliferated in Russia's late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. It was, in other words, religious sects in Russia, not science or the Orthodox Church, that developed new discourses for sex, yet *as discourses of carnality*, not about sexuality in society.[2]

[2] The fact that there existed a wide gap between the culture of common people / *народ* and official religious culture is very well illustrated by Viktor Zhivov on a much earlier example of the term *греховодник* versus the currently more recognizable *грешник*. Both words can be translated into English as *sinner*, but the former obsolete concept implies

On the cultural side, I will take up Foucault's strategy for argumentation to outline how discourses of carnality and the body evolved in Russia. The precondition for these debates was a particular public cultural site, newly emerging, where the era's intellectuals engaged in ongoing debates about both modernization and Westernization in Russian culture. Especially those debates pertaining to medicine and the sciences show the distance between the Russian intellectual sphere and that of Foucault's West, as those discourses in Russia are resisted by equally significant debates in religion and social philosophy. To make this case, I will pursue two discourses about sexuality, which I will take as emerging as intellectual discourses in the public culture of a Russia attempting to modernize. Where Foucault shows us how Western discourses about sexuality coupled discussions of guilt and shame (confession) with eroticism, I will in the following trace ongoing tensions in Russia between frameworks through which sexuality might be expressed in modern social domains, from religion and art through science. Discourses linked in the West remained more disjunct in Russia's public intellectual life, including most notably

– A discourse of CARNALITY, under which I understand a field of interest about the qualities and functions pertaining to the human body and flesh, including sexual desires. In using this term I largely follow Simon Karlinsky who applies his notion of "carnal love" to Russian literary history in his book on Nikolai Gogol,[3] but I will extend it to include more explicit attention to religious and medical debates of the era.

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a male sinner, usually an older man, who sleeps around with young women and defiles them. There is, in fact, very little negativity conveyed by the term (it can be translated as a "playful, frolicsome fellow"); it may have sounded almost endearing, as depraving young virgins was not considered a serious sin (as opposed to adultery, for example). Quite predictably, the word *греховодник* had not existed in the literary usage before Denis Fonvizin introduced it in the late 1780s. However, it had developed in popular culture for at least three centuries (Zhivov, web source).

[3] Karlinsky's perceptive lines on "carnal love" in Yazykov's poetry that arguably disappears in the Russian tradition after him and Pushkin are very important for my approach and will be referred to throughout this study:

> The woman in Yazykov's poetry is the very opposite of the disembodied Romantic ideal of other poets of the period. She is very much a creature of flesh and blood—a promiscuous young girl . . ., an easy-going circus rider, a seductive provincial housewife. Her main qualities are her beauty and her availability. In fact, a woman's physical availability is a constant source of the poet's joy . . . Leafing through a volume of his lyrics, one realizes to what extent the theme of CARNAL LOVE disappeared from Russian poetry after Yazykov's and Pushkin's time. (Karlinsky 213. My emphasis)

– A discourse of EROTICISM, used here as a narrower term, denoting sexual themes as presented in literary texts, especially as representing social norms for expressing love sanctioned in its social forms, rather than in relation to biology. Eroticism, as a discourse lying closer to social functions, is not always equivalent to carnality, which often functions in relation strictly to the corporeal.

In the West, as Foucault discussed, eroticism aligns with social guilt, as a discourse used to *manage* corporeality as carnality. In contrast, as we shall see, it is quite common in Russian writing to represent erotic themes in a "fleshless" way, i.e. to divorce them from the carnal and the corporeal—to draw lines between domains of investigation and experience differently than in the West.

My goal in pursuing this division is to highlight the special tensions and gaps that exist between these two realms of discourse in a Russian intellectual culture that was trying to modernize, to develop a new horizon of expectation (Wolfgang Iser's term, originally from H.G. Gadamer, developed by H.R. Jauss) for the issues and practices associated with discourses of sexuality and the body. That is, Russian intellectuals of the era were trying to find new ways to speak of bodies and sexuality, as they saw how these discourses functioned in the West, but they also had to produce texts that functioned within the horizon of expectation of their readers when speaking of issues of carnality and eroticism alike. Yet the linguistic and cultural resources they had at their disposal remained symptomatic of traditional Russian discourses which lacked the bridge—the link between confession and carnality—that facilitated nineteenth-century Western discourses to take the shape they had.

On the literary side, I will find the symptoms of how difficult it was for these Russian intellectuals to bring these Western debates to their readers. That difficulty manifests itself textually in two prevalent and traditional strategies of expression, characteristic of the era's literature, and is symptomatic of the domains of affect and experience for which it had few resources of expression. Russian traditions offered these modernizing intellectuals two traditional approaches to the body and carnality:

I will claim nevertheless in what follows that the theme did not disappear forever and was rediscovered in the Silver Age (1890–1921) and developed later in the work of such émigré or exiled authors as Georgii Ivanov, Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky.

– A tradition of SILENCE, or evasion of representation, which is used to avoid the very theme of sex and eroticism (yet another related term to be borrowed from Vasilii Rozanov is ellipsis or DOT-DOT-DOT / *многоточие*).[4] *Love* as a social function was represented in this tradition principally as a spiritual state, not in relation to bodies or society.
– A tradition of representation associated with the BURLESQUE, which enables the author to present carnality and eroticism in a deliberately ludicrous way, often using the grotesque to distract the reader from noticing an author's uneasiness in treating carnal scenes—a discourse which refuses to represent carnality differently across class lines, or within different domains of society. The intimate life of a celebrity or a major historical figure, often a lofty social topic in the West, for example, might be presented in Russia with vulgarity and salacity.

With these dichotomous discourses associated with the tradition conditioning Russia's public discourses (and the horizon of expectation of its readers), for example, authors who aimed at writing in Russian the kind of "high" literature that they knew from the West become literally tongue-tied whenever they needed to express love, affection, sexual desire

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[4] Contemporary Russian historian Dmitrii Galkovsky quotes Rozanov as he attempts to pinpoint the theme of sex in Russian culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

> There are some subtle (*деликатные*) themes. Through them people disclose or expose themselves to a larger extent than they are willing to . . . For example, the theme of love, eroticism and sex.
> Rozanov wrote:
>
> > Everything has been DRAWN and COMPLETED (*ОЧЕРЧЕНО и ОКОНЧЕНО*) in a human being, apart from the sex organs that next to all the rest appear to be some kind of a DOT-DOT-DOT or a vagueness (*многоточием или неясностью*) . . .
>
> Indeed, the human body elsewhere is all smooth lines, harmony, and it is only in the sex organs that nature has somehow slipped and become nervous . . . "DOT-DOT-DOT." How well expressed! . . . A multitude of meanings. DOT-DOT-DOT as something static, as a drawing; DOT-DOT-DOT also as something dynamic—these damned organs (*эти органы проклятые*) always change: increase, decrease, change colors. Also, DOT-DOT-DOT due to bashfulness, shame and fear (*из-за скромности, стыдности, срама*). These sorts of themes are [textually] marked by DOT-DOT-DOT. And, finally, DOT-DOT-DOT implies a vagueness, an enigma. A combination of the basest and the loftiest (*соединение самого низменного и самого возвышенного*). A complex and subtle theme . . . How well he [Rozanov—A.L.] understood it! . . . Poor Russians have lost all their wits over it. And if in late nineteenth century "the sex question" (*«половой вопрос»*) in Russia was just a crude variety of the overall European "pre-Freudian" psychosis, in the second half of the twentieth century it developed into straightforward scoffing (*прямое глумление*). (Galkovsky 368, emphasis added)

or anything related to human body, its qualities and functions, in a context where burlesque is the dominant strategy of representation. While European literatures of the era most certainly had both overly reserved and burlesque sexuality in them, what I will highlight here is the peculiar absences of socially marked discourses for sexuality—and particularly the lack of nuanced representations of sexuality (as either carnal or erotic) to characterize a novel's figures and their relationships in social-ethical terms, as would have been done in the West.

I am thus pursuing Russian discourses on sexuality as based on two traditional constructs that were perhaps inadequate both to real social-historical transformations and to literary benchmarks, which help to make transformations (modernization and other) thinkable to audiences. Each of the texts in question will be analyzed as precisely aiming at filling some of the gaps about psycho-social dimensions of sexuality (and thus as creating discourses to articulate the difference between carnality and eroticism) that were so often the subjects of Western literature in the era.

The term LIBERTINAGE (used in the title of the monograph) is discussed in detail at the outset of *Chapter 3*: it comes from Georges Nivat who understands it as a combination of political and sexual freethinking that had been arguably omnipresent in French tradition since François Rabelais but scanty or even missing in Russian literature until the Silver Age.

The term BIO-HISTORY (also used in the title, albeit in a somewhat figurative sense) comes from Foucault and is defined in the *Conclusion* by citing the exact passage from *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. It is closely related to his concept of "bio-power" and refers to a period in a national (or even civilizational) history when historical processes become directly impacted by the processes of human life and death. It is clear that literary discourses of sexuality in any culture will be dramatically affected—or even revolutionized—when such a historical shift takes place.

The term DISCOURSE (to be used in such combinations as the DISCOURSE OF SEXUALITY, or the DISCOURSE OF SEX AND EROTICISM) is used throughout these chapters not in a structuralist or psychoanalytical sense (as in Saussure or Lacan) but rather in a postmodern, Foucauldian one. It is understood to refer not only to language, but also to an institutionalized set of ways of thinking, signifying, and engaging in practices of everyday life, an archive that together comprises the social and cultural boundaries defining what can be said about a particular topic. In Foucault, any discourse is also closely connected with the interrelated concepts of power and knowledge(s), as well as with their production and distribution in

society. Generation of a discourse is always aimed at creating, elucidating, or managing a society's truth(s) about a given topic:

> [I]n the most general way [discourse] denotes a group of verbal performances . . . all that which was produced by the groups of signs . . . the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation [discursive formation]; thus I shall be able to speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse. (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 107–108)

My monograph thus posits Russian discourses on sexuality as a heavily bifurcated discursive formation that conditions textual performances about sexuality expressed in only a very limited number of options. The novels and modern science texts I will be introducing, in consequence, will reveal clear attempts to transcend these limitations and build a new horizon of expectation for their readers. The authors and intellectuals writing these texts are always forced to confront clear limitations in the discourse traditions they have inherited and which their audiences are used to, and so seek their own ways to move or circumvent those limits.

In order to see why moving traditional limits on expression is important, the term "discourse" needs to be supplemented with a reference to Pierre Bourdieu's body of work on the sociology of culture.[5] In his collection of essays *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), he defines the term FIELD as a social formation structured by way of hierarchically organized series of (sub)fields: economic, educational, political, etc. Each particular historical field is defined by its own laws of functioning and its own relations of forces, often irreducible to mere economic or political ones, because they combine both institutions and the habits of representation and social status in them—they combine aids to individuals' cognitive orientation as conditioned by social power. In any field, agents compete for control of interests and resources, just as the society in general does, and it thus in the nature of any field to also be conditioned by strategies for exercising power. In the literary (sub)field, this competition often concerns the authority inherent in recognition, consecration, and prestige within a society, what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital." Bourdieu also

[5] Bourdieu can supplement Foucault very handily because his vantage point is that of a sociologist of culture: Bourdieu's distinctions between (sub)fields of cultural production, cultural and symbolic capital, the market of symbolic goods as different from a regular market will be helpful in doing a more detailed (micro)analysis of Russia's literary process at the turn of the twentieth century.

defines such a literary field a subfield of restricted production, meaning that its production is not aimed at a large-scale market, but rather appealing to a local set of players involved in its administration and social uses (Bourdieu 28–73). In this case, the body of texts I have isolated can indeed be read as working for a narrow set of players on its field, "gaming," as it were, for new strategies of status building and new habits of representation that transcend the limits of the past.

Closely related concepts to this idea of a field are HABITUS (the system of dispositions, the "feel for the game" or a *sense pratique* that inclines agents to act in a specific way), the CULTURAL AND SYMBOLIC CAPITAL that accrue to the agents in the system, and the system's ability to produce BELIEFS (about what constitutes a cultural/literary work and its aesthetic and social value). For example, in order to enter the literary field, one must possess the habitus which predisposes one to enter that particular field, that "game," and not another, and one must know the ideology of that field, its beliefs (Bourdieu 1–25, 74–111). Tracing how an individual negotiates such a field, in consequence, can reveal general power and ideological orientations and decisions that define that individual as an agent over and against the general field.

To investigate discourses of sexuality as I propose to do will reveal Russian intellectuals of the Silver Age as engaged in a very unusual discursive field on which representations of class and identity are played out using resources inherited from the past but often inadequate to or fundamentally different from the Western discourses in which new problems and social issues came into the country. To trace moments in which the inherited archive of discourses is strained to the breaking point will shed light on the specific character of the birth of Russian modern literature and on its position within world literature. I will, therefore, trace what has generally been considered a derivative field of culture (Russia's intellectual history of the Silver age, deriving from French sources), and, instead of exoticizing or othering it, I will argue that it set its own course in attempting and often achieving a unique synthesis of modernizing tendencies and resistant forces from the pre-revolutionary era.

Opening out this difference, we will see that it is crucial to discuss, for instance, in what ways the Russian Symbolists were similar to or different from their earlier French counterparts or the Russian *fin-de-siècle* decadents were distinct from similar cultural trends in Anglophone or Francophone cultures. In this book, I consider it more critical to see them as different approaches to similar phenomena, set in cultural fields with different inherited discourses, rather than as one "deriving from" another.

Arguably, then, attitudes to the carnal and the corporeal, to sexualities and eroticism could be important litmus tests to discern differences and similarities between the intellectual fields addressing issues about sexuality at particular cultural sites, and to argue the Russian variants as original cultural products, not as derivative from the West, although responding to it. That is, I will argue that these Russian discourses were in fact completely modern *as considered within Russian fields of intellectual production* and thus very well tailored to the Russian context; they drew on Western exemplars but were by no means limited to them or straightforwardly derivative from them.

By setting the Russian situation about discourses of sexuality in juxtaposition with the more familiar Anglophone literatures of the West (British, Irish and American), therefore, the present study will recapture the innovations of several major Russian authors and thinkers who took up social issues surrounding sexuality from the West, yet who naturalized the representations of these issues solidly into the Russian context. As we shall see, the representations they produced were calculated to appeal to their native horizon of expectation. In consequence, their texts often followed the conventions of Russian discourses, thus "representing" the issues through pointed silences or evasions (such as Ivan Turgenev or Leo Tolstoy) or, conversely, by producing literary works of a fundamentally anti-erotic, anti-carnal intent, i.e., by taking into literature more traditional burlesqued representations of sexual themes (Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov). This manuscript thus has as its goal to paint a distinct picture of intellectual Russia's fraught move into its own version of modern discourses on sexuality.

Carnality and Eroticism in Russian Culture: Seeking a New Approach

In Russia, the US and Europe there exists a wealth of published research into the discourses of gender, eroticism and sexualities in Russian letters, as there have been for most Western national literatures and cultures since Foucault's work. Such British and American authors as Simon Karlinsky, Galina Rylkova, Donald Rayfield, Evgenii Bershtein, Olga Matich, Marcus Levitt, Laura Engelstein, Eric Naiman, Ronald LeBlanc and Eliot Borenstein have all advanced our understanding of the representations of corporeality, love, intimacy, and gender relations in Russian cultural and literary history. Much of that work, however, has been done from the perspectives of psychoanalysis, queer theory and/or feminist theory;

a fairly large amount of important biographical and semi-biographical criticism has also taken up these perspectives to speak of the identity politics of the founding generations of modern Russian literature. As such, these studies are framed in optics drawn from later generations; they help us recover significant data from these texts and to ask questions about these cultures, but they rarely attempt to assess the texts and intellectuals that exist within a coherent context of innovation.

Most recently, a psychoanalytical approach was practiced by Ronald LeBlanc in his book *Slavic Sins of the Flesh: Food, Sex, and Carnal Appetite in Nineteenth-Century Russian Fiction* (2009). For this author, Russian writers' reticence about sexual matters—from Gogol to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy—brought about their fascination with food. Both sexual desire and hunger for food are declared to be "animal appetites of the desiring body." Authors like Mikhail Artsybashev in the Silver Age to Vladimir Sorokin today have attempted to "transcend" or "challenge" these views as their characters (like Vladimir Sanin of the eponymous Artsybashev novel) preferred to indulge in the fleshly pleasures of eating and copulating (*Slavic Sins of the Flesh* 162, 222–26).

It is clear that this approach stems from Freudian and Jungian ideas about the "oral phase," the importance of feeding instinct and the like. There is very little evidence, however, that eating food and having sex can be linked in this crude, straightforward fashion, whether we talk about the texts of Tolstoy and Sorokin or any human everyday experience. Although it contains a large amount of useful observations and parallels with Western literatures, LeBlanc's book therefore does not give an answer why many Russian authors feared flesh and trivialized human sexuality.

What has been lacking, in other words, is an overall assessment of how these individual projects fit into a more encompassing social shift *within Russia*—how they reflect a field (in Bourdieu's sense, as above), and map a growing epistemological rupture (in Foucault's sense)[6] from old Russia to a more modern intellectual and social space. That is, these studies

[6] The concept of epistemological rupture is a crucial one in Foucault's history of ideas. It dates back to the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's notion of "epistemological acts and thresholds," to be later taken up by Louis Althusser and Foucault. These ruptures "suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time, cut it off from its empirical origin and its original motivations . . . they direct historical analyses away from the search for silent beginnings, and the never-ending tracing-back to the original precursors, toward the search for a new type of rationality and its various effects. They are the *displacements* and *transformations* of concepts . . ." (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 4).

do not recover the specific space occupied by such literature as social-political gestures *aimed at transforming the Russian episteme* in very specific ways and hoping to bring Russian solutions to problems of modernization into existence.

In her book on Russian decadence, Olga Matich makes a suggestion that will be central to my project of offering this more comprehensive account. She suggests that the famous Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Meetings in 1901–03, which included Vasilii Rozanov, Andrei Bely, Valery Bryusov, Aleksandr Blok, Nikolai Berdyaev, Pavel Florensky, and painter Ilya Repin, among others, "participated in the turn-of-the-century project of making sex discourse, becoming part of what Foucault described as the endlessly proliferating economy of the discourse of sex in modern European cultures" (*Erotic Utopia* 221). These meetings, however, were in my reading less interested in *becoming part* of European discourses on sex than creating Russian analogs for them. Rozanov was at the center of these meetings: they discussed homosexuality, marriage, celibacy, procreation, sex for pleasure, birth control, etc. It was indeed an unprecedented phenomenon in Russia's intellectual history, but how that was done reflects a very consistent appeal to existing Russian discourses, not an importation from abroad. Such moments of confrontation and naturalization will be my consistent focus here.

I concur with Matich that this group was indeed central to an emerging intellectual field—engaging on a field of struggle between orthodox and heretic ideas, without which the literary process would be unthinkable. However, I am going to disagree with Matich that a straightforward comparison with Foucault's "proliferating economy of sex discourses" is valid in this case. As I show in *Chapter 1*, the Russian Orthodox religious and philosophical tradition was only tangentially linked to Catholic "loquaciousness" about sex matters and so it implicates a field of discourses structured rather differently than that of Foucault's West. In this context it becomes critical to note that, of all the participants of the meetings, only Rozanov himself knew European discourses of "sexology" (represented by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, August Forel, Otto Weininger, Magnus Hirschfield, and others) well enough to put them on the table, which suggests that most of the participants were making their points using their native resources and need to be read through a different lens than a direct derivation would be. Overall, then, Matich is following important customary lines in emphasizing Western influences as principal factors in Russian modernization, where I will argue these influences as engagements actively confronting already extant, albeit limited, intellectual fields.

To be sure, extensions of and correctives to customary arguments tying modernization in Russia to westernization have also emerged. For example, Eric Naiman, in his 1997 book *Sex in Public*, echoes such authors as Olga Matich, Stephen Hutchings (in his essay on Pavel Florensky), Aleksei Losev (his ideas of the body), and Laura Engelstein (in her account of legal and medical discourses about sex in pre-revolutionary Russian society). But Naiman supplements such accounts by providing a very important theoretical introduction to the role of Russian philosophical traditions in shaping the views on corporeality, sex and eroticism of the Silver Age (1890–1917) and, later on, early Soviet period authors. To make his case, he discusses at length such works as Vladimir Solovyov's essay "Смысл любви" / "The Meaning of Love" (1893) and Nikolai Berdyaev's book *Смысл творчества* / *The Meaning of Creativity* (1916) as well as Nikolai Fyodorov's *Философия общего дела* / *Philosophy of the Common Cause* (1912), in which these philosophers attacked procreative and pleasurable sexuality ignoring or dismissing contraception and birth control, and pathologizing the sexual act itself. In addition, Naiman very helpfully introduces the discourse of Russia's medical community, represented by Professor Vladimir Bekhterev, who called for protecting society from sexual relations and lashed out on sex for pleasure as a cause of the most morbid societal sores. Naiman analyzes the controversial character of Berdyaev's glorification of sex, showing that in fact the latter metaphysician just borrowed this idea from Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done?* / *Что делать?*: the idea of "free love" in this author is "sanitized of sex and sexual parts." Chernyshevsky was famously dismayed by his own penis: "It's disgusting that we've been given this thing" (Naiman 27–37). Naiman thus adds enormously to the record on which I will draw, while making a considerably more aggressive case for modernization than he does.[7]

Other correctives have been issued from within Russian cultural and literary criticism, most notably in the work of contemporary philologists Boris Paramonov, Aron Gurevich, Mikhail Zolotonosov, Aleksandr Etkind,

[7] Another well-known historical account, in which special attention to representations of the body, sexuality, as well as gender roles in society, is paid, is James Billington classic 1966 study *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*. Billington is careful not to reduce Russian indigenous attempts at modernization in the late nineteenth century to Western influences, but he understands very well that oftentimes the predicament of Russian culture was to borrow certain ideas and concepts from Europe and take them to dangerous extremes (Billington 349).

and Dmitrii Galkovsky, which overall appears to be most enriching and relevant to the proposed topic.

In his recent book on Anton Chekhov's sexuality, *The Other Chekhov / Другой Чехов* (2007), for example, Zolotonosov explores the fact that, being a physician, Chekhov knew contemporary scientific ideas about human sexuality very well. Still, while we find in Chekhov's personal correspondence very graphic depictions of his own sex with prostitutes, his overall position on sex focused on how it was a scabrous, shameful and purely physiological act—something that a man resorts to due to his weakness. Zolotonosov suggests that Chekhov's obvious misogyny and sexophobia may have had less to do with personal neurosis than with the popular late-nineteenth-century medical belief that a human being could lose all his vital energy through indulging in sexual pleasure.[8] The critic rather convincingly traces Chekhov's fear and hatred of women to a voice from Central Europe: the formative influence of Leopold Sacher-Masoch, taken up by many Russian writers and thinkers of the late nineteenth century, including Chekhov. In my reading, however, Chekhov's position would appear as much less pathological than even Zolotonosov implies it is: within a longer Russian tradition, Chekhov is behaving as did many of his contemporaries, not just aping Sacher-Masoch but also reverting to many traditional stereotypes, making the Russian writer perhaps less pathological and more conservative than many critics might assume.

Aleksandr Etkind, one of the best known psychoanalytic intellectual historians working on the early twentieth century, has a similar approach in his three books on the period, amplifying conclusions like Zolotonosov's. In addition to tracing the influence of West European authors and scholars like Freud and Sacher-Masoch, he is keen on exploring sectarianism in *fin de siècle* Russia, viz. such influential sects as the *Skoptsy* (sects practicing castration) and the *Khlysty* (a Russian analogue to medieval flagellants). In his account, such spiritual trends were important for the formation of Russia's field of literary production of the period, since quite a few of its central figures, from Vladimir Solovyov to Aleksandr Blok, were fascinated and influenced by these sects' ideas and rituals, such as

[8] There is presumably little or nothing strictly Russian in this belief: many people must have held it across Europe or North America back then. But again, such things as demonization of women, aversion to the sexual act and, in Chekhov's or Dostoevsky's case, the need to resort to entomological metaphors to describe sexual desire and practice (such as "tarakanit"/ to cockroach or "to be lustful as an insect") appear to be characteristic in their Russianness.

abstinence from sexual intercourse in family life or their bizarre practices of collective or group sex. It is especially important for my purposes that Etkind dwells on the sexual, corporeal and medical/surgical elements of these practices, as it sheds light upon the ways these often extremely idiosyncratic popular beliefs were adopted by Russian intelligentsia and the upper classes. Etkind quotes a 1906 observation of Vasilii Rozanov: "The dreadful spirit of castration, denial of any flesh . . . has gripped the Russian spirit with such a force, of which in the West they have no idea" (*Хлыст* 102).[9]

My monograph will be set apart from these in taking the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the formative period when the literary discourses of the body and of sexuality took shape for the first time, even though the Russian literary field's formation was already essentially completed as modern. This is a methodologically crucial question for critics today because a contemporary assessment of the work of Chekhov, late Tolstoy, late Leskov or Rozanov arguably entails the analysis of how their work was perceived (adopted or rejected) by their successors in later periods, i.e. what influence these authors exerted upon the way themes like carnal love and eroticism were represented, for example, in the work of such Silver Age authors as Aleksandr Blok, Mikhail Kuzmin, Andrei Bely or Fyodor Sologub. As in the examples noted above, there has been a tendency, exacerbated in both Soviet historiography and reactions to it, to set pre-revolutionary culture apart from its heritors as somehow less indigenous, with the culture coming into its own only in the twentieth century.

Yet I will take a different tack on Russian cultural history, aiming at moving the idea that its "modern" social discourses are present much earlier than many would assume, albeit in forms not immediately recognizable to Western eyes, even as they sometimes draw on Western sources, and that many different moments of Russian modernization work the same way, looking to indigenous resources to address problems brought to Russia's attention by the West, yet not broached using Western tools. For example, even when one approaches a contemporary Soviet/Russian

[9] An excellent cultural history of sexualities and eroticism in Russia by a Russian author is Igor Kon's Part I ("The Historical Prelude") of his book *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today*, perhaps the most persuasive and informative analysis of the way sexual and erotic discourses have evolved from Ancient Rus through the crucial radical change of the Silver Age and up until today (*The Sexual Revolution in Russia* 11–50). I will be relying on Igor Kon's work and using it extensively throughout the monograph.

author, such as Yuri Mamleyev, Viktor Yerofeyev or Vladimir Sorokin, it is important to realize that these writers are indebted to their predecessors within Russia, no matter how much they also look at outside exemplars, and so, to use Bourdieu's terminology again, feel obliged to play by the "rules of the game"—whether being "orthodox" or "heretic"—within the sub-field of literary production that predominated. And in such cases, authors still take as their reference points the formative period of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth. There, they find their exemplars for discourses by scholars, literati, publishers, and consumers of literary production, that is, the reading public, just as their predecessors from the Silver Age that I discuss here paid attention to their predecessors. The consciousness of the existence of a continuous intellectual field, therefore, extends further back than the modern political state formations, and these later intellectual heirs see what indigenous traditions their predecessors drew on, and how these traditions still remained active in various audiences they wished to speak to. They see in these Golden Age or Silver Age discourses early *solutions* to problems of representation, not discourses that simply avoided modern topics purportedly only coming from the West.

For this reason, I believe that it is crucial to understand in what way the evolution of ideas about sex and the body in Russia was different from the European traditions that today's theorists dwelt upon (e.g. that of France). These discourses are, I believe, keys to the emergence of a consciously modernizing Russian intellectual field in the late nineteenth century, no matter how old-fashioned its political field remained.

In making this case for an early modernization of part of Russia's intellectual field, it is not my intention to mechanistically apply Michel Foucault's or Pierre Bourdieu's theories or models to Russia's intellectual and literary history. Both authors are very useful, however, for the kind of comparative macro-analyses that reveal these kinds of differential progress in a national culture. For example, Foucault argues that the figure of *silence* that I have identified as traditionally characteristic of Russian discourses about sexuality is of a very complex nature in locating such moments of historical rupture, even long before they become generally evident:

> Silence itself—the things one declines to say or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is . . . an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; *we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things* . . . There is *not one but many silences*,

> and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (*History of Sexuality* 27. Italics added)

Indeed, as we shall see, the figure of silence underpins both the strategy of evasion and burlesque in Russian literature in that it informs the creative philosophies of many, if not most, post-Pushkin Russian authors. Silences are built into these texts in extraordinarily conscious ways to signal what has been evaded, forcing attention to what lies behind the discourse void.

In this strategy of silence, as we shall see below, these authors often avoid or mystify sexual themes by using what might be called "Aesopian language."[10] For example, Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina* obfuscates the relationships of couples of Levin and Kitty or Vronsky and Anna by quite literally putting bodies behind screens and into darkness. In other texts, the burlesque predominates, such as when the carnal and the erotic are travestied in absurdly grotesque, ludicrously violent scenes. This is the situation, for example, in the escapades of Peredonov in Sologub's *The Petty Demon* / *Мелкий бес* or, much later, those of Fyodor Sonnov and many other characters in Yuri Mamleyev's *The Vagrants* / *Шатуны*. In one sense, silence and the burlesque recur in Russian texts of several generations as two different strategies for not saying things, for not developing a specifically literary language of corporeality and sexuality. Overall, both Russian men and women of letters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also proved unable to retain Aleksandr Pushkin's celebrated creativeness and light touch in representing sexual and erotic themes. Yet these passages do not occlude the existence of sexuality, even as heightened versions of traditional evasions, because, as we shall see, they are aimed at forcing audiences to *look at* what often cannot be said. Western texts, in contrast, use images of guilt and shame that force their audiences to look at the watcher and his or her reactions, instead.

This book will thus be structured to follow up on the newest critical voices on sexuality and its representation in Russia but also to make the case that the discourses of sexuality are considerably more characteristic

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[10] *Aesopian language* is a literary style of allegory used to conceal or mask the real thought or idea of the author. This concealment can be achieved via such stylistic devices as irony, allegory, allusion, periphrasis, etc. In Russian philology and literary criticism this term is usually traced back to Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826–1889) who compared his allegorical satirical style (necessary in the conditions of the tsarist censorship) to that of the fables of Aesop (Russian online dictionary of literary terms. http://www.slovar.info/word/?id=72807 June 30, 2008).

in a long-standing modern Russian intellectual field than has heretofore been assumed. It will offer a multi-faceted reconstruction of the complex interplay of the position-takings of the Russian Orthodox Church, the discourses of the medical and psychiatric community (the way sexualities were medicalized and/or pathologized in Russia), and literary and philosophical ideas about carnality and eroticism. I will then argue that all these discourses collectively shaped the ways in which sexual and erotic themes were treated by writers and thinkers of the Silver Age period as diverse as, for example, Nikolai Berdyaev, Fyodor Sologub or Mikhail Kuzmin.

After an initial chapter outlining these discourses in religion, philosophy, and medicine at the time, the study will turn to individual case studies. These authors' writings, in turn, shown through their own use of prevalent discourses of representation, reveal to us today how they confronted the very difficult task of creating a modern literary language[11] of love and carnality—a modern language of *society*—in a hostile cultural environment with traditional resources very different than those of Europe. Unlike in the predominantly Catholic countries of Europe, sex remained a taboo subject in officially Orthodox Russia and its predominantly other-worldly strategies for religious rituals and art. At the same time, Russian medicine and psychiatry were not focused on human sexual life in terms familiar from the sexologists of Europe. In consequence, these Russian authors were challenged to invent the Russian-language discourses reflecting indigenous experiences of sexuality, love, and gender identities, in a context where Western exemplars clearly did not suit. They had, for example, to invent sexual escapades of their characters and/or their "homemade" theories of pleasurable and procreative sexuality literally from scratch, oftentimes having to rely on their intuitive understanding of Russia's sexual culture, at others, on Russian tradition, and most rarely, on elements chosen from the few Western theories known in any detail.

The difficulty these authors had of meeting that challenge in telling new stories of society in the forms borrowed from Western literature will be highlighted in the present study by means of brief comparisons

[11] As I will use the term, a *national literary language* is a written language of the given nation, a collection of language norms of all sorts. In Russian/Soviet philology, it is usually described as a "totality of languages of business writing, secondary school teaching, formal correspondence, political journalism and belles-lettres—of all the linguistic manifestations of this particular culture . . . [part of which] may also exist sometimes in oral form" (Vinogradov 288–297).

to Western novels considered hallmarks of modern discourse on the self, identity, and sexuality. Western authors such as James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, Vladimir Nabokov, and Thomas Pynchon offer useful comparisons to the Russian writers and thinkers that form the body of this manuscript. Such Western authors were interested in describing the "darkest corners of the human souls" (one could certainly find a place for paraphilias and sexual pathologies in those). In other words, they were intrigued by the available scientific and psychological literature on sexualities available to them and were not at all "sex-shy" about employing it in their literary experiments. Their work thus exemplifies how prevailing *cultural* discourses could be transposed into new literary representations. Seeing what was possible in Europe not only will reveal how much greater the challenges were in Russia, but also how very innovative the Silver Age authors were in filling the lacunae.

I will in each of my chapters take up contemporaneous discourses from medicine, law, and religion in this way, using them as keys to specific silences or moments of burlesque in the novel. Through them, I hope to recover the authors' attempts to take up or evade discourses on sexuality. Their novelistic representations will thus be opened up as keys to their social diagnosis—to their "realistic" vision of the Russian situation, expressed in its own voice, and with its own claim to challenging readers to modernize or not. As noted above, I will use parallel passages from classic modernist fiction from the West to point up the differences.

Toward an Intellectual Bio-history of Russia: From Julian the Apostate to Avvakum to Nabokov and Brodsky

In Chapter 1, I first outline the profound differences between Western and Russian histories of sexology and psychopathology as a major factor determining the genesis of what I have called the "strategy of silence" and the "strategy of burlesque" in the history of Russia's literary discourses of representation—as determining of the discourses available to Russian authors even before the Silver Age. After that, I explore the strategic differences in perceptions of carnality and eroticism within Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox traditions. Finally, I dwell on two representative early works that proved important for Russian literary history earlier texts: Emperor Julian's *Misopogon* / *The Beard-Hater* (written in 362) and the Archpriest Avvakum's *Life* (1682). I show ways in which these texts may have served as sources for Russian evasiveness and grotesque in repre-

senting the corporeal and the erotic in classical Russian literature of the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

Against this background of the available field of representations of the medicalized self, Chapter 2 begins by taking up, briefly, early nineteenth-century authors such as Aleksandr Pushkin and Nikolai Gogol, whose work, within the Russian traditions, can be considered the founding figures of two different trends of representing sexuality that I am pursuing, with pro-erotic and pro-carnal discourse figuring prominently in Pushkin's case and anti-erotic and anti-carnal ones in Gogol's. I will isolate and present some central passages from Gogol's oeuvre to show the norms against which late nineteenth century authors had to innovate, setting a baseline that will allow the later authors to emerge as clearly either modernizing or rejecting modernizing forces in their texts—political gestures encoded in ways not yet recovered.

The chapter then offers a survey of several late-nineteenth-century Russian literary texts, based on textual examples of these discourses of eroticism and carnality, including authors as Chernyshevsky, Leskov, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Dostoevsky. The focus of these analyses—and the basis for my passage choice—will be the themes present in the psychology of the day as defining of the social self, and how they are transferred into literary representations.

In discussing these authors, I draw heavily on the existent secondary literature—especially the work of Simon Karlinsky on Gogol, Susanne Fusso on Dostoevsky, and Donald Rayfield on Chekhov (see the bibliography for full references). A critical assessment of Nikolai Leskov is central to the chapter, as he arguably was one of the few contemporaries of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky who dared to disagree with them in their respective takes on carnal love, family, procreation, femininity and masculinity, and gender roles in society. His sensitivity to issues of carnality and eroticism allows one to place Leskov in the Pushkin line of succession, which I call the *counter-strategy* of a more balanced expression of erotic and carnal themes, one less familiar as part of the nineteenth century.

Taking up a parallel strategy in another part of the Russian cultural field, in Chapter 3 I will start with discussing a Golden Age text—Aleksandr Pushkin's tale *Golden Cockerel*—as a formative anti-utopian manifesto of Russian letters and then turn directly to some most emblematic works of such Silver Age authors as Fyodor Sologub, Leonid Andreyev, Mikhail Kuzmin, Marina Tsvetayeva, Evdokia Nagrodskaia, and Mikhail Artsybashev.

All of these authors have sometimes been called "pornographers," and I will aim to deconstruct this term within the Russian context, as it applies to literary works drawing on a sociological understanding of the term and Vladislav Khodasevich's 1934 essay, in which he attempted to define "literary pornography." This clarification of terminology is necessary because the term "pornography" is oftentimes used uncritically by literary critics and scholars of Russia, as exemplified by many contributions to the collection of essays *Eros and Pornography in Russian Culture* (1999), in which the term *soft porn*, for instance, is applied to such texts as *Lolita* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Another necessary clarification in this chapter is done to the term "erotic fiction" / "erotic novel" that has been oftentimes used to describe texts profoundly anti-erotic, in both the authorial intent and often grotesque ways of representing sexualities.

In the following chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) I will continue with analyzing selected works of Ivan Bunin, Aleksandr Kuprin, and Georgii Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom* (1938) as a major post-Silver Age text informed by its sensitivities, and then move on to the major Russian-American author of the twentieth century—Vladimir Nabokov—and discuss his *Lolita* (1955) as a formative text of the modern Russian discourses of eroticism and carnality built upon the literary achievements of the Silver Age. The discussion of sexuality in *Lolita* and its Silver Age pedigree will be preceded by a detailed analysis of *The Enchanter / Волшебник* (1939), a novella written by Nabokov in Russian—arguably as a reaction to *The Decay of the Atom*—that in many ways was a prototype for the later novel.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, will be devoted to the poetry of Joseph Brodsky. The argument is built around an assumption that his poetry (in regard to the sexual and the erotic) is an amalgam of two major influences: Golden Age of Latin poetry and Russian low class and criminal jargons, including *мат* and *феня*. Brodsky was able to combine, for example, the libertinism of Catullus's poems with his deep intellectual curiosity toward the sex-related vocabulary of certain groups of Russian speakers, including (ex)convicts. Unlike many Russian writers of the past and present, Brodsky almost never shies away from referring to bodily needs and is always open to sexuality and eroticism.

In the Conclusion I will summarize my findings about Russia's field of restricted (literary and cultural) production with regard to discourses of carnality and eroticism as that field was shaped in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and continues through the early twentieth century and up to today. At the turn into the twentieth century, I will claim, these literary transformations of these traditional intellectual projects

argue that Russian popular culture for the first time in its history found itself in a direct interaction with cultures of upper classes and intelligentsia (via the mystical and metaphysical appeal of the practices of certain sects, for instance). A new *habitus* that emerged as a result of these new interactions, tensions, and struggles for symbolic capital and power came to the fore.

Additionally, throughout Chapters 3 and 4, I will target the individual contribution of Vasilii Rozanov as the hallmark for an indigenous modern turn, since, according to Etkind, he shifted the discussion of sex issues "into the plane of ideological struggle," or, to put it otherwise, "provided Russian ideological discourse with a new twist and unexpected dimension" (*Хлыст* 186). I will argue for the centrality brought up by his strategies of rigorously defending heterosexuality as a main spiritual value—the first to do so—and of shockingly blaming homosexuality and homoeroticism for Russian culture's asceticism and denial of the body and bodily functions and needs. It would be fascinating to place Rozanov into the dialogical cultural context of his times, as well as to see how his provocative ideas about eroticism and carnality were received and developed (or silenced and/or ignored) in subsequent periods of Russian and Soviet literature.

CHAPTER ONE

CARNALITY AND EROTICISM IN THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE: TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF A DISCOURSE OF SILENCE

> Zakhar Pavlovich had been sitting with Sasha at the railway station for the whole 24 hours waiting for a troop train going Sasha's way and had smoked three pounds of low-grade tobacco, not to be too nervous. They had spoken about everything, except love. It was about love that Zakhar Pavlovich said these warning words in an ashamed voice, "You are a grown-up boy already, Sasha, you know it all by yourself… The main thing is that you *shouldn't do this business on purpose*—this is the most deceptive thing: there is *nothing in it* but it is as if you were drawn somewhere, as though you wanted something… Any man has the whole *imperialism sitting in his bottom part* (*в нижнем месте целый империализм сидит*)…" Aleksandr couldn't feel any imperialism in his body.
>
> Andrei Platonov. *Chevengur, a Novel* (1929).[1]

The main argument of this chapter is built around the observation that Russian literary culture is short of the necessary discursive resources for discussing sexualities and eroticism. Sexual behavior is presented in dominant literary and social discourses most often as a pathology or aberration that can only be burlesqued or represented as grotesqueries, often of a brutal and repulsive nature. To pursue the consequences of this lack, I will attempt in this chapter to outline a genealogy of what I have termed a *discourse*, or a *figure, of silence* as it evolved throughout Russia's cultural and intellectual history. This canvas will reach from the crucial progenitor Emperor Julian through the "founding father" Archpriest Avvakum to the Silver Age period of Russian culture and literature (1890–1921) that saw the unprecedented interaction between the predominantly sectarian *narod* (common people, peasantry), and secular but intellectually curious intelligentsia and part of the nobility, and finally to the emergence of such crucial thinkers as Vasilii Rozanov and scandalous "mystics from the

[1] *Чевенгур* 77–8. All translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise marked.

people" like Grigorii Rasputin. Aiming to illustrate this thesis of a lack of discourses for sexuality and eroticism using literary examples, subsequent chapters will offer a survey of numerous specific works of nineteenth-century and modern Russian literature.

For everyday life situations in Russian-language cultures, this utter inability to articulate themes of eroticism and sexuality in a meaningful way is responsible for a number of cultural predicaments and idiosyncrasies. One such idiosyncrasy is that the cultural weight of literature remains very high in Russian culture,[2] and thus one should not underestimate its role in shaping the outlooks of the people who are sexually active now, including the ways they think and talk about sex. When appropriate discourses are missing from that literature, in consequence, the public sphere will itself be shaped in particular ways to compensate for it.[3]

The main study question for a comparative philologist and/or a sociologist of literature interested in the Russian tradition is this: why does this particular *discourse of silence* dominate in Russian letters, and how is the representation of sexuality therein similar and different to that of the other (e.g., Francophone or Anglophone) literary traditions? Despite the obvious fact that, with regard to sexual matters, all Western cultures (whether we include Russia in those or not) have always taken up discourses of sexuality in rather controversial ways, the question of degree remains: i.e., *to what degree* is one able to render artistic and cultural production and consumption relatively more receptive and open to human

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[2] Aleksandr Etkind notes the "programming influence of literature" in Russia (*Содом и Психея* 329), while Joseph Stalin, following Yuri Olesha, aptly called Soviet writers *инженеры человеческих душ* / "engineers of human souls." Dmitrii Galkovsky calls the Bolshevik/Soviet rule *графократия* / "graphocracy"—literally, the rule of writers (Galkovsky 365). And, conversely, he thinks that the development of Russian literature has never been an immanently "literary process" as it "has always with professional complaisance fulfilled certain social demands and has never been therefore something explicable mainly 'within itself'. The laws of literary development in Russia were not literary laws" (Ibid. 78). When I talk about the relatively high "cultural weight" of literature in Russia, I imply this special status of creative writing and writers in Russian culture.

[3] Indeed, Western observers were sometimes shocked by the amount and scope of (quasi)pornographic literature, film and other media that had flooded the republics of the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s up until the late 1990s. But maybe the immense marketability and popularity of such periodicals as *Playboy* and *Spid-Info* in Russia can be in part explained by the reading public experiencing a deficit of "serious" erotic writing and thus having to resort to racy publications and not always tasteful pieces of advice on sexual matters that one can find in sex tabloids and men's magazines. *For detailed discussions of erotic media and presumed limitations of erotic literature in Russia, see, for example, articles by Masha Gessen* "Sex in Media and the Birth of the Sex Media in Russia" or Karen Ryan "Misreading Misogyny: The Allegorical Functions of Russian Porn."

sexualities, even using discourses sometimes outside of the mainstream? The end of the trajectory I will trace in the current chapter, therefore, addresses how these discourses began to emerge in distinctly Russian forms, not necessarily resembling those in the West, but in full awareness of domestic lacks.

This chapter will set the scene for my subsequent discussions by outlining what the *discourse of silence* about sexualities in Russia originated from and rested on. Sections will trace the religious-cultural roots of the problem, its early accommodation in literary discourse under Pushkin, later attempts to use medicalized discourses to supplement this lack, and then finally various confrontations with Western literary discourses on the topic that cannot provide the solutions sought by indigenous intellectuals. That situation, I argue, has persisted into the twenty-first century.

The Birth of the Discourse of Silence: A Historical Sketch

Prerevolutionary Russian religious culture was heavily dependent on a neo-Platonic version of Christianity received through Byzantium, and it is no surprise that this culture determined early boundaries for discourses of sexuality and the flesh in Russia. One of its most familiar artistic manifestations was the Russian icon, in which the representation of the human and divine form was notoriously "fleshless," i.e., the bodily, the corporeal was simply not represented. For example, Andrei Rublev's iconic representations of human and divine forms (such as his *Trinity*) are markedly non-naturalistic: one can observe in them what Orthodox theologians call "spiritual flesh," that is, the bodies look incredibly light, frail and unearthly. Familiar Western tableaux with madonnas as full-bodied wives and mothers were simply absent within this culture of representation.[4]

In his essay « Русская церковь » / "The Russian Church" Vasilii Rozanov gives an example of representing Virgin Mary in Russian church painting:

[4] See Amy Mandelker's "The Sacred and the Profane: Tolstoy's Aesthetics and Pornography" for a detailed account of Tolstoy's indignant critique of Western religious art, which, as she argues, has a lot in common with Orthodox critiques of it for its "fleshy naturalism" (Levitt 408).

For a convincing argument in favor of Byzantine tradition's importance for Russian icon painting (as opposed to much weaker Western influences), see Engelina Smyrnova's article "Simon Ushakov—Historicism and Byzantinism: On the Interpretation of Russian Painting From the Second Half of the Seventeen Century" (Baron 169–183).

> Russian church singing and painting . . . are both fleshless, lifeless, "spiritual," in the strict accordance with the general order of the Church. Mother of God breast-feeding Jesus the infant is an impossible spectacle in a Russian Orthodox temple. Here Russians went against the historically verifiable Word of God: for instance, although Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus when she was still very young, not older than 17, she is never represented at this age [in Russia]. Mother of God is presented as an old or already aging woman, around 40 years old, who holds a well covered Baby Jesus (compare to Catholic naked bodies); she looks not like his Mother but his nanny who is nursing someone else's unhappy child: her face is invariably mournful and often with a tear running from her eye . . . This all grew out of one tendency: to dispense with all human traits, everything usual, mundane, earthly in the religion and leave only the divine, the heavenly, the supernatural. (*В темных религиозных лучах* 14–15)

These prohibitions were very conscious and very resistant to change. For example, even the slightest violation of this tradition—a more realistic representation of iconic images—enraged the Archpriest Avvakum, a renowned schismatic and religious writer of the late seventeenth century.[5] Frenzied and frightened by the Patriarch Nikon's reform of the Orthodox religious rituality (the icon-painting canon in particular), he wrote:

> Here is how they handle it today: they picture Emmanuel with a puffy face, mouth reddened, hair curly, arms and muscles thick, fingers pumped up, just as the legs are with fat hips, and he is all depicted as fat-bellied and chubby as a German (*яко немчин брюхат и толст учинен*), only a saber at his hip seems to be missing. This is all now done with a fleshly conceit (*по плотскому умыслу*) as all the heretics [Nikonians—A.L.] have fallen in love with fleshly plumpness (*толстоту плотскую*) and defiled our icon-painting. Our Christ the Lord is all about the subtle feelings (*тонкостны чювства имея*), just as the theologians have taught us. One must see God's Word on the Blessed Virgin, and the images must be presented according to John Chrysostomos: not even remotely similar to what the current heretics are thinking about. And this is all that bastard Nikon, our foe, has fancied that they all should be painted as if alive; he's been rearranging everything in the Italian way, that is, in the German one. (*Life* 251)

One can only fantasize about what the wrathful Archpriest, for whom the adjectives "Italian" and "German" were strong swear words (used interchangeably), would have written had he been able to visit the Sistine

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[5] An excellent account of Russian religion and society of the period, including Nikon's reform, the Schism and Avvakum's challenge, can be found in *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* by Paul Bushkovitch (Bushkovitch 51–73).

Chapel or the St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome and witness much more "fleshly" representations of human and divine forms.

Much of all ancient Russian culture (including art and literature) related to Orthodoxy in one way or another was anti-carnal. Pre-Christian Russian epics called *byliny* had been relatively more open to sexuality, and sometimes were even obscene, but they apparently produced little or no direct impact on what we know today as classical Russian literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

One might be able to treat the Russian Orthodoxy's initial uneasiness with sex matters as its deep-seated critical distrust of the famous biblical call to "increase and multiply." One of the historical figures usually quoted approvingly by some Russian intellectuals (for example, by Dmitrii Merezhkovsky in his eponymous 1895 novel that influenced many Silver Age authors) is Julian the Apostate, Emperor of Rome (331–363), who used satire to cite but ultimately defuse the validity of fleshly discourse for his culture. When this well-known opponent of Christianity decided to ridicule the town of Antioch, which was predominantly Christian, Julian wrote his famous satire *Misopogon / The Beard-Hater* (362). Aleksei Losev, a renowned Russian and Soviet philosopher and historian of antiquity and Christianity, summarizes his achievement as follows:

> *The Beard-Hater* . . . is written in the form of the author's sham self-criticism and mocking praise of the Antiochians. Julian "criticizes" himself here for asceticism, modesty, unshaven beard, etc.; while "praising" the Antiochians for the effeminacy of their mores, careless way of life, and licentiousness. Indirectly it is also a critique of Christianity because the population of Antioch was predominantly Christian. There are some direct attacks at the texts of the New Testament in Julian's satire as well. (*История античной эстетики* 364)

Why would one go as far back as Julian's *Beard-Hater* to describe much more recent cultural phenomena? Obviously, the unshaven and unkempt beard has always signified its bearer's indifference to the pleasures of the carnal and the corporeal and sometimes (as was the case of Julian) his disapproval of lasciviousness and all forms of hedonism. It is notable that for today's Russian traditionalists the "question of the beard" is the locution used to speak of this issue of paramount importance, although now the beard seems to be, on the contrary, a sign of male sexual prowess. For instance, the well-known "Eurasianist" Aleksandr Dugin (an organizer of the extremely conservative and nationalistic "imperial marches" in Moscow and other cities in Putin's Russia and a happy owner of a spade-like thick beard) writes:

> Peter the First, as is well known, was famous for ordering all the boyars to shave off their beards. It was a desacralizing act of some kind of a "ritual castration" of all our people. Our traditional men, whose metaphysical solar function would manifest itself in wearing a beard, were thus deprived of the crucial element of religious piety and sacral signs of sexual traits (*сакральные знаки половых признаков*) in the metaphysical dimension. (Dugin, web source)

This reasoning is quite typical and symptomatic of what has been what seems in Russian intellectual life an age-old assumption, at least since Nikolai Fyodorov (1829–1903) and Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900):[6] Russian people's sexuality should be discussed strictly in terms of metaphysics, while the threat of Westernization is likened to a ritual castration of the "wrong," non-sacral (non-iconic) kind (distinct from the "right" one, aimed at forms of asceticism such as the practices of Russian sects like the *Skoptsy* / castrates: I will discuss Russian sectarianism toward the end of this chapter).[7]

The fact is that Russian Orthodoxy experienced a much more powerful influence of Neo-Platonism than Western Christianity. In Neo-Platonism, *symbolic* phenomena are of primary importance: such things as the beard may point to some unearthly substance, to some sort of transcendence, rather than to a mundane bodily habit of shaving. The beard is a symbol or religious figure for the more important transcendent realm rather than a reference to the individual believer's earthly life. Platonism also meant that the Russian Orthodox Church took on very different philosophical bases for the discourses of its most important theological debates. Thus one early result is that, in the Russian Christian tradition, the works of Aristotle and his followers were practically altogether ignored, whereas they were significant challenges within Western Church traditions from the first millennium onward.

In contrast, the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a Neo-Platonist of the fifth century CE, exerted the strongest impact upon the Russian Church. Arguably, Orthodoxy (at least, in its Russian version)

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[6] Fyodorov's "philosophy of the common task" and Solovyov's ideas about love are discussed in detail by Irene Masing-Delic in her book on the myth of salvation in Russian literature (Masing-Delic 76–122). Another source on Solovyov's ideas about love and femininity and their influence on Russian Symbolists is Olga Matich's informative article "The Symbolist Meaning of Love: Theory and Practice" (Paper no. 24–50).

[7] Andrew Blane's essay contains an informative discussion of Protestant sects in late imperial Russia, which could be helpful in learning more about Orthodoxy vs sectarianism in the period (see Blane 267–304).

accumulated many such variants of the "anti-corporeal" sides of both Platonism and Neo-Platonism. It appears to have particularly endorsed Plato's thought of the body as a "prison-house for the soul," a view which is absolutely incompatible with Western Catholicism, wherein, under the influence of Aristotle, it is assumed that the unity of the soul and body is more perfect than the life of the soul as such. There, the entelechy of man or woman's being is constituted of the unity of body and soul, a thesis which has been thoroughly rooted in Western literature(s). For example, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Virgil suggests in response to Dante's question about what is to be expected for the souls of sinners after the Last Judgment: "Return unto thy science, / Which wills, that as the thing more perfect is, / The more it feels of pleasure and of pain. / Albeit that this people maledict / To true perfection never can attain, / Hereafter more than now they look to be" (*Inferno*. Canto VI. 104–108). This answer implies that, as a result of the unification of the body and soul, the righteous people will feel more pleasure, while the sinners will suffer more.

This kind of ideology is alien to Russian Orthodoxy. Paradoxically, however, the latter echoes, and is akin to, the overt discourse texts of Julian the Apostate, who has nonetheless expressed the anti-corporeal orientation of Neo-Platonism most brilliantly. It should be noted that despite all of his purported "anti-Christianity," Julian initiated discussions between representatives of Christian "heresies" in an attempt to strengthen the Church. He was also buried in the Basilica of the Twelve Saint Apostles in Rome, which points to his complex relationships with Christianity. I have included this historical character to show that one of his satires, *Misopogon*, considerably overlaps with the general mood with regard to corporeality in some Russian Christian writers, and provides an early example of what discursive strategies were used to hold religion and corporeality apart. Later religious aesthetes like the Archpriest Avvakum who perceived all the carnal as "filth" would have undoubtedly endorsed some of Julian's thoughts. It is also highly ironic that Julian's hatred of beard-shaving will be echoed by that of the Russian Old Believers in the eighteenth century.

It is interesting that as Julian mockingly attacks all the aspects of the pleasurable lifestyle of Antiochians (excessive theater-going, dancing and partying, overindulgence in food, women's independence, lasciviousness and even the right to bring up their children; well-shaven "effeminate" men's faces, among other things), once in a while his anger and frustration seep through his bitter sarcasm. He almost seems to regret he is unable to join the Antiochians in their mindless bodily pleasures; at times he

seems nearly jealous. And yet he seems to wholeheartedly believe that his unkempt hair, unshaven beard, the "evil odor" of his body, and his habit of vomiting food (albeit probably all poetic exaggerations aimed at producing a humorous effect) are actually something for a venerable monarch to be proud of. He also praises himself for having "knowledge of Aphrodite, goddess of Wedlock, only for the purpose of marrying and having children and [knowing] Dionysus the Drink-Giver, only for the sake of so much wine as each can drink at a draught" (Julian 481).

This hypocritical ambiguity that simultaneously acknowledges and contains sexuality does eerily remind one of some strange combinations of pompous moralizing and bitter xenophobia one encounters in many Russian cultural and political figures of today, whose patriotic anger sometimes borders a thinly-veiled envy of certain Western values, lifestyles, and mental attitudes.[8] More than that, Julian's assumption that his "unkempt appearance and lack of charm . . . are more genuine since they have especial reference to the soul" (Julian 501) strikes one as a quintessentially "Russian" line of argumentation: the less one cares for his/her looks and body, the more "soul" (s)he in fact possesses. In this insight, Julian may be treated as an important predecessor for such literary giants as Avvakum, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, and his discourse an early example of a thematic link that remains almost unquestioned into the twentieth century—that soul is won at the expense of body.

The tradition of Russian Orthodoxy was thus to a large degree built upon a Neo-Platonist rejection of "carnal desires" and "sensual pleasures." Later on, those were simply ignored and/or silently assumed to be the turf of a bitter rival—Catholicism.

The Russian Orthodox Church has never been able (or willing) to modernize itself by moving beyond this strict dichotomy. Nothing analogous to the West's transition to such secular art forms as sculpture and painting in the era of Renaissance ever took place in Russia. Unlike Catholicism, Russian Orthodoxy did not bother to develop a detailed, loquacious discourse that could nuance various forms of anti-corporeality and take up more differentiated discussions of piety and the body. Indeed, to use a mixture of Foucault's and Weber's terms, even a model for conversation on sex matters between the priest and his "spiritual progeny" has never existed.

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[8] One can only recall such TV anchors and "politologists" as Mikhail Leontiev, Gleb Pavlovsky, Aleksandr Dugin, Sergei Markov and many others who are in charge of the pro-Kremlin propaganda in Putin's Russia. Not all of them have unkempt looks, of course, but their anti-Western rhetoric never lacks demagogy and aggressiveness.

Any radical anti-carnality was suppressed within the Church and replaced by the *figure of silence*. Human sexuality did not have to be discussed, i.e., argued for or against: the strategy was to silence it and ultimately pretend that it did not exist at all. (Anachronistically, this is what the famous televised pronouncement of a Soviet woman in the perestroika times, *У нас в СССР секса нет* / "We have no sex [in the USSR],"[9] was all about—and in this historical light it does not sound outrageous at all.)

In other words, the upshot was that sexual culture was not regulated by the Church: due to the Church's silence and lack of influence in all strata of society, discourses about sexuality were left to develop at the "grassroots" level by the population itself, outside the domains of the Church and its intellectual influence. Max Weber, in his comprehensive study of world religions, suggests:

> The poorly developed and rather general method of confession, which was particularly characteristic of the Russian church, frequently taking the collective form of iniquity, was certainly no way to effect any permanent influence over conduct. (Weber 561)

This point needs to be further clarified. Unlike Catholicism, the Orthodox Church has never undertaken a detailed survey of the sexuality of its congregation. There existed certain exceptions, such as the cases that became common knowledge of the public or those of repentance at the initiative of a layman. In these cases, the punishment for committing the "sin" could be severe. However, the typical Orthodox sermon itself never included the specific advice on sexual matters that one finds in abundance in those of rural Catholic priests (Gurevich 253–255).

The results for Russian society were extremely odd. It follows that those who sinned secretly were not subjected to inquisitorial interrogations of the pastors (as opposed to what Foucault notes in relation to the Catholic countries of the West [*The History of Sexuality* 18–23]). One can therefore formulate the main principle of the Orthodox treatment of sexuality as an object of theological/intellectual discussion: a detailed, elaborate inquiry of sexual habits and oddities would have been no less abominable than the sin itself. The Russian scholar Igor Kon

[9] The Soviet woman, Lyudmila Ivanova, made this statement in a 1986 Boston-Leningrad "television bridge" hosted by Phil Donahue and Vladimir Pozner. She was quite accurate in a sense: "sex" was almost a swear word in the USSR, associated with "pernicious Western influence" and was commonly replaced by the euphemistic "love" in a "cultured" conversation. See the Russian Wikipedia for a complete quote: http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/В_СССР_секса_нет

characterizes this phenomenon in the following way: "The contradiction between the highest spirituality and total fleshlessness 'above' and rough naturalism of everyday life 'below' runs through all of the history of Russian culture, including many peasant customs" (*Сексуальная культура в России*, web source).[10]

Unlike major Anglophone cultures, moreover, Russia seems to have experienced very little communication between cultures of the social "top" (upper classes) and "bottom" (mostly peasantry) until the very end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (when for a brief period there emerged a keen interest of the intelligentsia in spiritual strivings of the common people—the *narod*; for example, in such influential sects as the Khlysty and the Skoptsy). The two appear to have existed concurrently, each running its own course. Starting with the period of the Russian Orthodoxy's Schism (late seventeenth century), the Church has been mostly concerned with fighting Old Believers and other sectarians as schismatics, rather than with establishing control over the sexualities of the *narod*.

A prime example of the discourses marking typically Russian spiritual strivings is provided by the Archpriest Avvakum's autobiographical *Житие* / *Life* (c. 1673). Avvakum was a major opponent of Patriarch Nikon's church reform and a major ideologist of the Old Believers. He was burned alive in 1682.[11] *Life of the Archpriest Avvakum* was considered by Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky as the most important, formative text of then-emergent Russian literature. Early in the text, this great founding father of Russian literature shares with us his guiltily pleasurable

[10] For a pioneering account of sexual life in Ancient Rus see also Eve Levin's 1989 book *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700*. Kon provides a brief but comprehensive history of sexuality in Russian culture from Ancient Rus to the 1990s in his chapter "Sexuality and Culture" (Kon & Riordan 15–44), which can serve as a useful sequel to his above-mentioned "The Historical Prelude" to *The Sexual Revolution in Russia* (11–50).

[11] The figure of Avvakum and other figures and features of the Russian Schism (Raskol) are discussed in the very informative and useful essays of James Billington and Pierre Pascal (Blane 189–222).

In addition, a useful account of the history of religious literature in the "pre-Petrine" Russia's is Victor Zhivov's article "The Religious Reform and the Emergence of the Individual in Russian Seventeenth-Century Literature" (Baron 184–198). Two essays on Old Belief by Robert Crummey are also important: "The Miracle of Martyrdom: Reflections on Early Old Believer Hagiography" (Baron 132–145) and "Old Belief as Popular Religion."

See also Dmitrii Likhachev's 1973 monograph *Razvitie russkoi literatury X–XVII vekov: epokhi i stili* (in Russian).

(maybe even slightly masturbatory) experiences after being tempted in the confessional:

> During the time when I was a priest, a young woman came to me for confession, burdened with many sins, having committed fornication and all kinds of sins against purity, and she began to tell them to me in detail, weeping in the church before the holy Gospels. But I, thrice-accursed physician, fell sick myself and burned inwardly with lecherous fire; it was a bitter hour for me. I lighted three candles and fixed them on the lectern, and placed my right hand over the flame and held it there until the lust was extinguished in me. Letting the young woman go, I removed my vestments, and having prayed, I returned to my home in great sorrow and distress. It was about midnight, and upon entering my house, I wept before the icon of Our Lord until my eyes were swollen; and I prayed fervently that God separate me from my spiritual children, for the burden was too heavy for me . . . And I fell with my face to the earth, weeping bitterly. (*Life,* web source)

This level of frankness is indeed unprecedented in Russian writing. At some point Avvakum reaches the spiritual rock bottom of self-effacement and confesses he would prefer to remain silent about his sins:

> Now I beg the forgiveness of every true believer: there are things concerning my life of which perhaps I ought not to speak. But I have read the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul: the Apostles said of their deeds, when God was working through them: "Not unto us but to our God be the praise." And I am nothing. I have said and I repeat: I am a sinner, a fornicator and a ravisher, thief and murderer, friend of publicans and sinners, and to every man a wretched hypocrite. (*Life*, web source)

This disclaimer has the effect of turning the readers' eyes away from the details of the sins, leaving them acknowledged and rejected—but unarticulated.

Finally, the Archpriest ecstatically equates himself, i.e., both his body and his soul, with cow dung, pus, and human feces (the English translation does not do justice to some of his morbid "strong expressions"):

> How, then, shall we be punished for violating the commandments of the Lord? Ah, we shall deserve but fire and torment! I know not how to pass my days! I am full of weakness and hypocrisy and enmeshed with lies! I am clothed with hatred and self-love! I am lost because I condemn all men; I think of myself as something, whereas I—accursed!—am but excrement and rot, yea, dung! Foul of soul and body (*...кал и гной есмь, окаянной—прямое говно! отвсюду воняю—душею и телом*). 'Twould be good if I lived with pigs and dogs in their kennels; they too are evil-smelling, like my soul. Their stench is from nature, but I am evil-smelling because of my sins, like a dead dog left lying in the streets of the city. God bless the bishops who buried

> me underground; at least, giving out stench to myself for my sins, I offer no scandal to others. Yea, this is good. (*Life*, web source; *Житие Аввакума и другие его сочинения* 68)

This is all not just a matter of Russian Orthodox submissiveness (*смирение*) and disregard for individual human life; rather, this is a discourse, in which corporeality is directly related to absolute filth and abomination, without elaboration or discussion of degrees of guilt or the practices which make one guilty, as one would find in Western Catholic discourses on sin. One might be tempted to call Avvakum a true martyr or an ascetic or even a masochist; nevertheless, his pathologization of his own body might sound a little too exuberant, even for a schismatic Old Believer of the late seventeenth century.

If this is the prevailing discourse, then society is left without the resources for "official" discussions of certain topics. Other factors then added to the extent of this growing silence. Since Peter the Great (early eighteenth century), the upper classes had been rapidly westernizing themselves. In the Russian high court, aristocrats and cultural elite (3–5% of the actual population) spoke a variety of modern European languages (most notably, French and German) and classical ones (Latin and Greek). Many of them were not fluent in Russian and did not feel any need to think or write in it. Another factor in Russian cultural life has always been the strict censorship of all cultural production by both the Church and the State. Before Aleksandr Pushkin (1799–1837) Russian literature had not managed, or even attempted, to create discourses of eroticism and sexuality. The Europeanized upper classes did of course employ a well-developed language of sex but this language was not Russian—these discussions were conducted in French, Latin or even sometimes Greek. It is well-known, for example, that such scandalous French authors as Evariste de Parny and the Marquis de Sade were extremely popular in Russia in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, as were Roman lyrical poets like Ovid or Catullus and such masters of Menippean satire as Petronius Arbiter and Apuleius.[12]

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[12] This study is not focused on Russian popular culture, which went in decidedly different directions. There were, for example, a lot of often obscene and anticlerical oral folk tales collected by Aleksandr Afanasiev (first published anonymously in Geneva in 1872 under the title *Russian Secret Tales* / *Русские заветные сказки*). They contain interesting strategies and stylistic devices of dealing with the erotic and the corporeal, such as the use of allegory and Aesopian language. Viktor Shklovsky used Afanasiev's tales to illustrate his famous *ostraneniye* / "defamiliarization": for example, in depicting coitus using allegories from the animal world. However, these oral folk tales, jokes and anecdotes were either

During this time, there did exist a whole corpus of anonymous "obscene" writing in the Russian language, but it produced little or no impact upon "official" literature (that is, the literature associated with social and intellectual elites). The infamous author of obscene, scabrous verses, Ivan Barkov (1732–1768), wrote in Russian vernacular using a vast array of the famous *Russki mat* words and their endless derivatives. Yet he was never officially published, and the way his texts were printed and distributed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be easily compared with the famous "samizdat" of the Soviet dissidents of the 1960–80s. As Pushkin once said jokingly, whenever censorship is finally abolished in Russia, the first thing to be published will be the complete works of Barkov (Larionova, web source).

Barkov's works (most notably, the long poem *Luka Mudishchev*) might strike today's readers interested in the evolution of the Russian language in an unexpected way. The linguistic "conservatism" and stability of these obscenities written in the mid-eighteenth century is such that many of Barkov's lines could easily have been written by any contemporary Russian novelist of a similarly anti-erotic creed—for instance, by Vladimir Sorokin. At the same time, this lack of linguistic "evolution" can be in part explained by the above-mentioned neglect of this "lowbrow" culture by a more "highbrow," mainstream Russian literary tradition.

Pushkin and his Cult: Sex Discourses after Pushkin

It is a possibility that certain Russian authors dreamt about generating a sexuo-erotic discourse in the Russian language: most notable among these may have been Pushkin's predecessor Nikolai Karamzin. Yet even Pushkin himself (as Russians like to say, "Pushkin is our everything") in *Eugene Onegin* (1833) tells his reader that Tatiana's famous love letter to Onegin was written by the fictional woman in French and that the Russian the

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largely ignored by the elite or *a priori* ascribed to the sphere of scabrous lowlife storytelling, often fascinating to adolescents but overall not worthy of taking seriously. Boris Uspensky provides the additional example of Appolon Grigoriev (1822–1864), a Russian poet, who grew up in a noble family. In his memoirs Grigoriev rues his "too early" exposure to folk tales and jokes heard from the family's coachman and recalls that they were full of obscenities and strong sexual content, along with anticlericalism. In addition, Afanasiev's book was forbidden by censors and published abroad: it is safe to suppose that not very many Russian readers could access it even at the end of the nineteenth century (Uspensky *129–150*). *See also Igor Kon's "Sexuality and Culture" for more details on the Afanasiev work* (*Kon & Riordan 16*).

author is going to use to render it to his readers is by definition inferior to the original French. Even the greatest Russian poet could feel tongue-tied when he had to describe the love confessions of his heroine who came to be a symbol of Russian womanhood!

Why was the Russian literary discourse of love and sex so underdeveloped even in the secular sphere? One interesting explanation may be that one of the major cultural myths of Russia (and one of its most bizarre cultural idiosyncrasies) was the delusional idea of the "chastity of the common Russian people," fostered by the complete blindness imposed by religious discourse.[13] Once the Russian people are figured as eternally chaste, there is no need to speak about sexuality in the Russian language—the unchaste are not Russian and not of the people. Furthermore, any frankness in describing human sexuality via a literary medium might concomitantly be considered as an insult to those chaste common Russians by outsiders to them.

Laura Engelstein notes that Russian physicians of the late nineteenth century were "the last to abandon their populist dreams" in that they "clung to the image of the sexually innocent peasant despite evidence to the contrary uncovered in the course of extensive practical experience" (Engelstein 163). A "presumption of chastity," she goes on to argue in her historical analysis of endemic syphilis in Russia, "governed the conclusions of the numerous observers who attributed sores on the lips and mouths of artisanal workers to communal eating habits." Oral intercourse could never be blamed as the observers believed that "*coitus per os* ('sapphism') . . . is not practiced in Russia" (ibid. 195).

Apart from that, writers who wrote about sex in Russian were running the risk of becoming targets of control by both church and state censors.[14] Needless to say, French-language texts (or Greek ones that were present in the times of Catherine the Second) were, to a certain extent, beyond this control of indigenous life and expression. A good example of what could have happened to a writer who would dare to compete with the dominant Church for spiritual leadership or simply criticize the Church's

[13] See an interesting discussion of this phenomenon by Igor Kon and Viktor Yerofeyev at the latter's radio show *Encyclopedia of the Russian Soul*: http://www.svoboda.org/programs/encl/2005/encl.020505.asp

[14] One might suppose that most Orthodox clerics and lower level state bureaucrats did not know foreign languages as well as aristocrats did. It may have been thus somewhat easier to avoid problems via writing in a foreign language (e.g., French), not in Russian, although it is clear that some censors did know the foreign languages.

patriarchs is the excommunication and anathematization of Leo Tolstoy in 1901.

A wonderful insight into the nature of Pushkin's cult in Russia is provided by Andrei Sinyavsky's (a.k.a. Abram Tertz) *Прогулки с Пушкиным* / *Strolls with Pushkin* (1975). It is quite remarkable that this long essay remains the only critical attempt to "desacralize" Pushkin, portraying him as a human being with his own strengths and weaknesses and certainly ridiculing the reverence and awe with which this author is treated by Russian/Soviet critics and the reading public.[15] Predictably enough, Tertz was widely hated and misunderstood both inside the Soviet Union and in Russian emigration circles (perhaps most notably denounced by the wrathful Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in 1984). Even the most oft-quoted passage from the essay was quite meaningfully misinterpreted:

> Pushkin ran into great poetry on thin erotic legs (*на тоненьких эротических ножках*) and created a commotion. Erotica was his school (*эротика была ему школой*)—above all a schooling in nimbleness (*школой верткости*)—and we are, as a result, indebted to it for the flexibility of the *Eugene Onegin* stanza as well as for other tricks.... (*Прогулки* 55)

Sinyavsky would often recall the way his numerous astonished fellow Russian emigrants kept asking him what he meant by Pushkin's "thin legs." After all, as the renowned writer Vladimov marveled, Pushkin was "a very athletic person" (*Прогулки* 42). The author of the dangerous essay had to explain to him that this was supposed to be a metaphor: "It is some kind of sorcery: the man [Vladimov] wrote the whole novel-metaphor and stumbled over those legs" (Ibid.).

In my opinion, Sinyavsky used this metaphor because in Pushkin's texts one can very easily observe some kind of "foot fetishism" that seems very strange to Western readers. In *Eugene Onegin*, for instance, he somewhat paradoxically complains that in the whole of Russia, he is unable to "find

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[15] One could also recall some other Russian intellectuals of earlier periods who professed a more reserved, levelheaded attitude to Pushkin and tried to question his cult. But many of them (e.g., such poets as Marina Tsvetayeva or Anna Akhmatova) were also guilty of a somewhat hysterical adoration of their idol, bordering on reverence and awe. Tsvetayeva soberly called for remembering Pushkin's « уст окаянство » / "curse of the mouth" (i.e., his frequent use of foul language and taboo words) and « пёкло губ » / "heat of his lips" (she must have meant Pushkin's sexuality—*Мой Пушкин* 174). She also famously wrote elsewhere: "I shake Pushkin's hand, but I don't lick it" (*Мой Пушкин* 182). However, in her essay "My Pushkin" Tsvetayava finds herself in the state of exaltation when she ecstatically exclaims that "each of us" (all Russians) has been shot in the abdomen by Dantes (Pushkin's killer in the duel) (*Мой Пушкин* 34).

three pairs of slender female legs" (*Люблю их ножки; только вряд / Найдете вы в России целой / Три пары стройных женских ног*). The poem's narrator also reveals his desire to touch his undisclosed beloved's legs with his lips (*Евгений Онегин* 22, 23). This is arguably the reason why Andrei Sinyavsky comes up with Pushkin's own metaphoric "thin erotic legs." The on-going argument about Pushkin's use of sexual metaphors, however, also documents in its own way the problems faced by would-be elite Russian authors in crafting a literature that could be assessed as Russian and as applicable to a broad range of human experience, as was being thematized in the Western literatures of the era.

The most obvious reason for Pushkin to start writing about love in Russian was the fact that his Russian and French were almost coeval, and thus he simply made no difference between the two languages when he wrote—he did not need *Russian* conceptual resources for eroticism, he "just" needed to transpose concepts familiar to him into the Russian language. An apt example of his several plagiarizations from the French is his notorious slightly pornographic long poem *Gavriiliada*—very much a free translation into Russian of Evariste de Parny's *La Guerre des Dieux* (1796). In addition, Pushkin seems to be one of the few Russian writers (Nikolai Leskov may be one of the few of his nineteenth-century successors) who felt little or no shame before the "chaste common people": despite being a member of the ruling class, he was always ready to learn from commoners: peasants (for instance, his own serfs) and merchants. He often wore plain clothes of a Russian "muzhik," attended village fairs, etc. His lifestyle marked him as one of the common people, and so he perhaps had a little more latitude to experiment with expressions that were officially *not* of them.

To get back to the just quoted Tertz passage, Pushkin was a very "nimble," light-minded individual (although he may indeed have had athletic legs). Unlike many other creators of the Russian literary language, he was apparently much less preoccupied with such a fleshless aspiration as the finding of Russia's own, unique path, its exclusive position in the world, and the lesson it was supposed to teach humankind. I will talk about Pushkin as one of the founders of anti-utopianism in Russia's intellectual history in the subsequent chapters.

As hinted above, Pushkin may have been the first Russian author who dreamt about what might happen if state censorship and church control could be somehow lifted, i.e., what kind of a literary discourse of sex and eroticism would then emerge. However, he had no way of knowing that even in the mid-twentieth century his perhaps most faithful disciple and

connoisseur of his work, Vladimir Nabokov, would write his *Lolita* in English. One might fantasize that Nabokov, who then somewhat reluctantly translated his novel into Russian, might be a bizarre reincarnation of Tatiana Larina, failing to write about erotic passion in her native tongue and doing it so masterfully in a foreign language.

In the West (France, Britain or Germany), such social-erotic discourses in literature were preceded by the medicalization of sexuality. Sex was indeed under control of the Western Catholic church but this control was incomparably looser, or at least more plural, than in Orthodoxy. In fact, at least one form of Western fear and suspicion of sexualities (*sexophobia*) as we know it today developed as a direct result of medicalization (discussed below). Here, then, another contrast between Western and Russian available discourses becomes crucial.

At the time when medicalization started in the West (the mid-nineteenth century), there was no psychiatry in Russia at all (Kannabikh, web source). No scholarly (medical or psychiatric) discourse of sexuality was therefore possible, nor any viable precursors in notion of pastoral care and nuanced psychic reactions, discourses that played significant roles in the emergence of Western psychiatry. After the 1917 October Revolution, certain attempts to create this discourse were made, but they were almost instantly suppressed by the Bolshevik regime. The Soviet ideological establishment adopted exactly the same strategy for dealing with sexuality discourses as had been so successfully practiced by the Orthodox Church prior to the revolution, that is, *silence*.

Some American historians of Soviet culture and literature (Gregory Carleton, Eliot Borenstein, Wendy Goldman) tend to somewhat overstate the liberalism of the Bolsheviks' sexual politics in the 1920s and 30s. It is quite possible that in the early 1920s, while Lenin was still alive and surrounded by such advocates of Russian sectarianism as Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich and relatively open-minded politicians like Anatolii Lunacharsky or Aleksandra Kollontai, the new regime experimented with the "demise of the bourgeois family," allowed divorce, abortion, talked about communitarian or group sex, etc., very much along the lines of anti-Orthodox ideas of certain Russian sects (e.g., the Khlysty), but it is obvious to any reader of Evgenii Zamyatin or George Orwell that sexual freedom, like any respect for one's carnal desires and bodily needs, is incompatible with any form of totalitarian utopias. Aleksandr Etkind argues quite convincingly that the whole project of the Bolshevik revolution was aimed, among other things, at "overcoming the original sin," i.e. the very idea of sexual intercourse. In the Soviet communist consciousness, this idea was tightly associated with

hateful capitalism and later cultural Westernization/Americanization. Andrei Platonov was one of the first to emphasize this association in his 1929 novel *Chevengur* (see the Epigraph to this chapter) and other works, such as *Happy Moscow / Счастливая Москва* (1936), quoted by Etkind. Dmitrii Galkovsky shows Lenin's personal extreme sexophobia through a fascinating reading of his "philosophical" writings, correspondence and public talks (Galkovsky 398–400).[16]

In the Gorbachev perestroika era and into the early to mid-1990s, some tentative attempts to generate sexual discourses were made (in literature, such authors as Viktor Yerofeyev and Vladimir Sorokin immediately come to mind) but nothing even remotely comparable to the eroticism of Western literatures was ever created. For the last decade, in the Putin era, one can observe yet another move toward silence and silencing. Teaching sexuality-related courses in secondary schools has been banned; 16 erotic magazines have been closed; a 2006 gay pride parade in Moscow was prohibited by Mayor Luzhkov; all the NGOs dealing with birth-control issues have been shut down.[17] Nowadays in Russia, gays can more or less safely go to gay nightclubs in Moscow or Petersburg, but as Luzhkov recently confirmed at a joint press-conference with his Western counterparts—the mayors of Berlin, London and Paris—Russian authorities equate what they call the "propaganda" of gayness with that for tobacco and alcohol. "The overwhelming majority of Russian society does not accept the propaganda of homosexuality *and* non-traditional sexual orientation," added the vigilant official (leaving his audience to marvel at, among other things, what groups he implied by the latter category) (Luzhkov, web source).

In other words, one peculiarity of today's Russia is yet another triumphant return of what I have tentatively called the *discourse of silence* with respect to social issues. One is allowed to quietly practice his or her sexuality without risking becoming a target of social control, but the very minute one starts *talking* about it in the public sphere (i.e., publishing,

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[16] Necessary correctives to these views of some historians were made by Igor Kon in his chapter "The Soviet Sexual Experiment" (*Sexual Revolution in Russia* 51–128), in which one of the subchapters is tellingly entitled "Sexophobia in Action."

[17] See, for example, http://blotter.ru/news/articleoADC7/default.asp or http://www.utro.ru/articles/2006/06/28/560865.shtml. Since at least 2004 Russian web-based media have been replete with announcements of crackdown on periodicals and NGOs working with sex, eroticism and gay issues.

It is not hard to attribute the seeming ease, with which Putin was able to turn things around after Yeltsin's liberal period, to the long-standing tradition of Russian totalitarianism. The underdevelopment of erotic and sexual discourses in literature is arguably related to it as well.

broadcasting or, to use Luzhkov's catchy term, "propagating" sexuality), he or she is exposed to the righteous wrath of the ever-chaste, immaculate common Russian people (a.k.a. the "majority of Russian society"). What should be perhaps emphasized specifically is the obvious fact that the strategy of silence is applied not only to homosexuality but to heterosexuality, as well: homophobia marches on hand in hand with sexophobia in post-Soviet Russia, as it did in pre-Revolutionary Russia, characterized by an aversion to all other manifestations of human sexuality.

Aleksei Losev on Plato's Loathsome Eros

It may appear rather odd that someone like the above-quoted Aleksei Fyodorovich Losev (1893–1988), a famous Russian/Soviet connoisseur of Greek and Roman antiquity, was an extreme homophobe and sexophobe despite all the doubtless erotic appeal of Greek and Roman literature and philosophy. In addition, Losev was famous for his excellent knowledge of the Russian Orthodox tradition.

Losev was among those many Russian intellectuals who had to go through Stalin's labor camps in Solovki from 1930 to 1933. A possible explanation of his homophobia may have been his involuntary exposure to homosexuality in the camp but nothing is known about it, and it seems futile to speculate about it.

In his *Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology* written in the 1930s Losev produced an astonishingly angry attack on Eros in Plato's dialogues *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. This attack is launched in the little subchapter entitled "Marriage, Love, and Family." Losev starts with several disparaging remarks on the pagan nature of Platonism as a cult of the body and denies the common belief that Plato was an idealist. Quite the opposite, Losev argues, he is obsessed with the corporeal, does not see anything beyond the body ("non-carnal ideas") and is therefore a "materialist." Marriage in Platonism implies a rejection of the spiritual and the individual; it recognizes only the bodily aspect of it (the actual intercourse is necessary to bear a baby). "Platonic Love," Losev goes on to claim, contrary to the most popular belief, is an "unworthy amusement," a "trifle" that has nothing to do with marriage sanctioned by the government. The purpose of marriage is only for a woman to get pregnant and bear offspring. Later on, when a man and a woman are past marriageable age, they should feel free to copulate with anyone they want as much as they want, without caring about such nonsensical issues as love, passion, affection, etc.

But these views Losev locates in Plato's *Republic*; he gets really indignant when he gets to *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Losev argues that there is no heterosexual love in Plato whatsoever, it is always a feeling between two grown men or of a man toward a boy or youth (e.g., ephebe). Losev pejoratively describes Plato's ideas about androgyny and the "third sex" and then lashes out on Plato for thinking of homosexual desire and love as preferable to heterosexual: "*Mal'chik* / boy is ubiquitous in Plato." To Losev, Platonic Eros with its homosexual undertones is thus nauseating ("causes a subtle feeling of nausea," as he ironically puts it). Platonism is

> in a literary sense, a boudoir perception of ideas, their contemplation through one's own phallus . . . *Mal'chik is present everywhere, even where there is no place for concupiscence* . . . Even when the communication with the *mal'chik* becomes spiritual, the impression is yet more nauseating. While the filthiness of pederasty was being openly savored and Socrates with his interlocutors was salivating and lisping about the bodily beauty of boys, one could still laugh around and get away with a joke or two. But then it gets much worse when Socrates keeps talking about *mal'chiks* even when he demands that there should be no concupiscence in love relations . . . this is really a lot worse and totally unacceptable. (*Очерки античного символизма и мифологии* 847)

Finally, in *Symposium* Plato, according to Losev, creates the "filthy atmosphere of a cheap pub" ("kabak"). The Russian philosopher is annoyed moralistically with the fact that the drunken Socrates and his "booze buddies" have dared to discuss love and sexuality:

> In all world literature I have not found any works more vile and abominable, a more mean and filthy "tragicomedy" than these *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Plato is totally incompatible with either Christianity or West European Romanticism. The latter is so much deeper, broader, much more spiritual and interesting. (*Очерки* 859)

Losev then goes on to review the history of Platonism and neo-Platonism but at the very end of the book he gives a fascinating catalogue of Plato's mutually exclusive "avatars":

> An apologist of monks and philosopher of the police, defender of slavery and mystical communism, a professor of dogmatic theology, persecutor of the arts and sciences, a sworn enemy of family and marriage, a suppressor of love and emancipator of women, an ecstatic mystic and brilliant artist, the preacher of military barracks, abortions, child murder, musical education of the soul; a pederast, a moralist, the strictest ascetic and dialectician—this is all Plato . . . Something to think about, isn't it, comrades? (*Очерки* 904)

Perhaps Losev did not intend it that way but his essay leaves a lot for us, his comrades, to think about the Russian philosopher himself, Plato notwithstanding. Why would such a connoisseur of Plato reduce *Symposium* with its rich plot and spiritual/intellectual metamorphoses to just a series of drunken depictions of the phallus? Why would he heap curses on Platonic Eros without even bothering to construct an argument of his own? The answer seems self-evident: Losev shared a deep-seated aversion of sexualities (and not just homosexuality) with many other Russian/Soviet intellectuals of his time, and his philosophical thinking was therefore seriously impeded.

Consequences of the Medicalization of Sexuality: Russia versus Europe

It would make sense now to dwell in a little more detail on some conceptual aspects of sexuality in Russian literature. To this end, I will employ a brief comparative analysis of the functioning of sexuality discourses in Europe and Russia in the nineteenth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the educated strata of European society were living in the epoch of medicalization of practically all areas of social life (Scull 118–161). Most prominently, medicalization affected the spheres of sexuality, crime, "geniality" (i.e., being a genius) and other "deviant" phenomena. It was tightly linked to, first and foremost, the soaring influence of physician or medical communities that had managed to so successfully intrude into all the spheres of social life.

For my purposes of studying erotic discourses in Russian literature, Michel Foucault's brilliant analysis of the medicalization of sexuality in his *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* appears to be most attractive and instructive. Foucault argued that medicalization had replaced the moralistic-religious control of pre-Enlightenment Europe and brought about the heyday of psychiatric discourses of sexuality. In consequence, everyone's attention was drawn to all sorts of pathological and "physiological" aspects of sexual behavior. Various, oftentimes extremely quaint, classifications of sexual deviations emerged. The whole life cycle of a human being from birth to death was sexualized. Doctors encouraged their patients to tell them about their sexual lives—both real and imagined—in smallest detail, in a way that confessors had earlier (*History of Sexuality* 53–73).

The only naturally "healthy" form of sexuality was also delineated at the time, as well—that of a heterosexual married couple, fostering discourses of domesticity that were rising at the time. However, even this

form underwent numerous restrictions: a couple's sexual life now had to take place inside the bedroom forever closed to the outsider's eyes (and ears). Its only goal was expected to be procreation, as posited by many Christians (*History of Sexuality* 103–114).

All this is widely familiar, but I would like to emphasize a new aspect of Foucault's concept. He thought that all this bulky psychopathological discourse was employed to control sexualities, and this control bred new forms of sexual violence (for instance, the pathologization of masturbation, according to Foucault, became a variety of sexual violence toward children [*History of Sexuality* 104]) as it endlessly multiplied the recognized types of sexual pathology. On the one hand, it is obvious that literary censorship's need for vigilance was enhanced. On the other, this "blooming garden" of sexual pathology also provided fiction writers with inexhaustible material as they set about representing the new pathologies, which had just been created. One just had to open any of the numerous books on sexual pathology and find oneself in a world more extravagant and exotic than that of *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*. It can be supposed that, for example, without this development, Joyce would have never been able to focus on Leopold Bloom's uncanny sexual habits and fantasies in such detail. All the nuanced depictions of defecation acts, voyeuristic peeping, masturbation, etc. found in *Ulysses* (1921) are, after all, unfolded very much along the lines of the sexopathological canon of Joyce's times. For a reader familiar with the sexological debates of the late nineteenth century, it is immediately clear why Oscar Wilde's Lord Henry is feasting his eyes on the portrait of a young attractive man in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1893).

Writers like Wilde and Joyce were extremely sensitive to the verbal context of their times and absorbed this delicate aroma of sexual pathology with extreme relish, with all the fibers of their conscious and unconscious. This ability holds true especially for authors—again, just like Joyce or Wilde—interested in exploring "the darkest corners of the human soul," where one can expect to find all sorts of secret urges, down to paraphilias and sexual pathologies.

It is conspicuous that the attention to sexual pathology in Western literature has always followed lead of medicalization and pathologization of sex by physicians and biologists. Indeed, Nabokov's *Lolita* could hardly have appeared without US psychiatrists' obsession with pedophilia preceding it.[18] Great writers arguably made use of the medicalized discourse

[18] I discuss this novel's sexual and erotic aspects in detail in *Chapter 5*.

of sexuality as their material, but this discourse created some striking vantage-points for them. I will take an episode from Joyce's *Ulysses* as an example of how a logic of representation can parallel a medical optic.

In the "Nausicaa" chapter, Leopold Bloom furtively watches a teenage girl named Gerty MacDowell at a Dublin evening beach and masturbates. From the viewpoint of the psychiatry of his times, he suffers from multiple sexual pathologies: voyeurism, infantile sexuality, fetishism (he looks at her stockings and underwear), etc. But Gerty is also in a "pathological condition" at the moment: she apparently has the very premenstrual syndrome that up to nowadays has been spurring the minds of Western psychiatrists (Caplan 154–168). Joyce must have found it amusing to allow the intrusion of so much sexual pathology into the chapter written in the style imitative of a women's novel (*Ulysses* 346–382).

As desires like Gerty's were pathologized along the lines of what Foucault calls the "hysterization of women's bodies" (*History of Sexuality* 104–105), the medicalization of sexuality as a means of social control created an unprecedented wealth of material for Western writers. To use Max Weber's language, it was an unforeseen and unintended effect of medicalization. The subsequent censoring and banning of such novels as *Ulysses* and *Lolita* are of secondary importance in that regard. It is crucial for my present argument that the expressive capabilities of the literary language, themes, and plot lines were thus significantly enhanced.

In nineteenth-century Russia, the situation was quite different. Psychiatry as an academic discipline began to be taught at the Saint Petersburg Military Medical Academy in 1867 (following a decree of the Russian government). The first course was given by Ivan Balinsky, a pediatric surgeon. His lectures were described as "so bold in their psychological and clinical analysis that [they] could appear as rather brilliant hypotheses than strict scientific analysis" (Kannabikh, web source). This implies that psychiatry in Russia was largely introduced and supported by political authorities, whereas in the West it was promoted through a vigorous initiative of physicians, criminologists and other influential lobbying groups (for instance, judges, social workers, all sorts of "humanistic" intellectuals). In Russia, in consequence, psychiatry would for a long time exist at the fringes of medical science (one version of psychology, in contrast, was earlier officialized in the form of the Pavlov Institute).[19]

[19] For a comprehensive history of Russian science and its influence on culture, including philosophical thought and literature, as well as the ways in which biology and medical science were developed in Russia in relation to national culture and society in the late

One can, in fact, observe a stunning contrast between the importance of medicine (and psychiatry in particular) in the West and its absolute impotence in Russia, where doctors often were starving in the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that psychiatry was in fact slowly developing and translating Western concepts into Russian academic medical science, and while some doctors were in the long run allowed to try to treat sexual pathology, no sexopathological discourse *per se* ever emerged in Russia. Even the writers who were physicians by background and worked as doctors never paid any serious attention to sexual problems, which were not in the framework of medical practice in the era.[20] Anton Chekhov (a practicing physician) was very well familiar with the medical practice of his time, which was predominantly focused on being able to provide a minimal amount of food to hospitalized patients rather than diagnose their sexual pathologies: in the few psychiatric clinics people were simply starving (Kannabikh, web source).

In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church was part of the state apparatus at the time and exerted a strong influence upon spreading the ideas of sexual pathology. It also directly affected sex education in schools and universities (or the absence thereof). In fact, the very few Russian psychiatrists who existed were locked within their own circles of narrow academic specialists and did not have a chance to intrude into the private lives of Russian citizens. It was only in the early twentieth century that a certain interest in the works of Krafft-Ebing and early Freud emerged in Russia, but this movement was interrupted by World War I and the October Revolution (Kannabikh, web source).[21]

After the Revolution, psychiatry had to go through a very difficult epoch. Throughout the whole Soviet period only *three* standard psychiatric hospitals were built. The rest were housed in secondary school buildings, former kindergartens and prison barracks. Therefore, the main means of controlling sexuality was still silence, now manifested physically in a lack of appropriate facilities. As noted above, this strategy had been

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nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, see the second volume of Alexander Vucinic's study *Science in Russian Culture: 1861–1917* (Vucinic 3–34, 234–272, 424–490).

[20] The limits of Russian medical discourse on prostitution and syphilis and its key differences from the European sexopathological canon of the time are aptly analyzed by Laura Engelstein (*The Key to Happiness* 128–211).

[21] The popularity of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1889) and other European works on "sexual psychopathology" of the period in pre-revolutionary Russia is discussed by Evgenii Bershtein in his informative article "Psychopathia Sexualis in Turn of the Century Russia: Politics and Genre" (Levitt 414–41).

deeply enrooted in the Russian Orthodox culture, notably in one of its popular offshoots, the "philosophy of the name." Aleksei Losev, one of its theoreticians, supposed that pronouncing a "name" meant bringing the named to life. It follows that, if we don't talk about something, it does not exist. Interestingly, the KGB after the Twentieth Communist Party Congress (1956) seemed to intuitively adopt a similar approach. Whatever was being said outside the public sphere, "in the kitchen" of one's apartment, did not "exist" as a social act; therefore it did not have to be persecuted: in Brezhnev's Soviet Union, for instance, a lot of people were really unhappy about the regime, but as long as they kept their discord relatively private, they were not sent to the Gulags any longer.

This method of controlling sexuality by silencing it proved to be a stunningly efficient tool for censorship compared to Western discourses of sexopathology used to generate oppositional representations of sexuality. In the West, physicians appeared to be "instructing" writers to boldly discuss sex in all of its manifestations (be it for the purpose of its "normalization" or not). Even in today's Russia, none of these speaking positions exist. As one of the very few contemporary Russian experts in sexology, Igor Kon, has recently remarked, "Russia is about the only European country that does not have a single scientific sexological journal. Professional sexological education is not available either. Teachers and doctors graduating from Russian universities are as sexologically illiterate as 30–40 years ago" («Подростковая сексуальность», web source). This is the way Russia's postcommunist development is seen by someone who is often referred to as one of a handful of fighters for creating a "discourse of sexuality" in Russia.

In Russia, then, only certain "elect" writers have had a chance to access psychiatric discourses, whereas a large number of Western writers were able to engage the discourses from many sides: medical, socialized, and otherwise. In most Russian cases, exposure to any such discourses was purely accidental, as in the contemporary example of Yuri Mamleyev. This novelist's father was a professor of psychiatry and a forensic expert. Mamleyev's literary texts are thus, and not surprisingly, saturated with a profound understanding of psychopathology in its Russian version—a combination of Karl Jaspers and Ivan P. Pavlov.

A tentative conclusion for the discursive space of sexuality in Russian culture recommends itself. In the West, thanks to the habit of constantly analyzing, discussing, "spying on" one's own and other persons' sexuality, at least the upper middle class has in the course of the twentieth century managed to develop the corresponding linguistic means for making this

conversation possible. More than that, they grew accustomed to monitoring for explosions of sexuality in the smallest detail of their lives, psyches, and actions: for instance, distinguishing between clitoral and vaginal orgasms, the orgasm as a result of stimulating the G-spot, etc. Accordingly, this development enriched and enhanced the expressive power of the literary language. In Russia, on the contrary, one could observe the virtual absence of this discourse, which forced the creative writers into having to resolve the complicated task of the *independent formation* of such a discourse. Needless to say, they were doomed to fail and have in fact failed to create a discourse where the complete absence of any elite vocabulary for the topic is the norm. The indicators of this failure can be easily discerned in today Russia's literary scene, which has engaged sexuality primarily in the terms known to folk literature or to specific elite discourses: the anti-erotic, grotesque texts of Vladimir Sorokin and straightforwardly psychiatric descriptions of pathology in the works of his mentor Yuri Mamleyev are amongst the most obvious examples.[22]

One other comparison is here important. Foucault's analysis of French, predominantly Catholic, culture includes an argument about the evolution of confession techniques in the Catholic Church into the discourses of sexology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis toward the end of the nineteenth century—an association of pastoral care and psychological states. In his account, this shift from sexuality as a church-monitored discourse into a socially monitored one is directly related to the development of literary discourses of the erotic body as "confession is not a way of getting around a rule of silence . . . confession and freedom of expression face each other and complement each other" (*Abnormal* 170).

In Russia, this principle of *communicating vessels* allowing for a transition of discourses between literature and religious/sexological sphere simply could not operate because the dominant Russian Orthodox Church did not develop any analog to Catholic confession—Russia lacks exemplars for narratives of the forbidden, and for the culture of guilt, shame, and atonement that went with the confrontations between body and soul that so occupied Catholic clerics. Such exchanges of ideas about the corporeal between artists, literati and intellectuals on the one side and religious

[22] By saying that these two authors, Mamleyev and Sorokin, are anti-erotic, I do not mean to undermine their obvious achievements in Russian *belles-lettres*. The argument is that they have done little or nothing to contribute to the formation of literary discourses of sexuality, which is, as they say in Russia, not so much their fault ("vina") but their trouble ("beda").

common people / *narod* on the other was therefore limited to the former's fascination with the often bizarre sexual practices of such popular sects as the Khlysty, Beguny, Skoptsy, etc. that soared in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries—there were essentially no broad-scale social confrontations between class, groups, or institutions about sexuality. It was, in other words, religious sects that developed new discourses for sex, yet *as discourses of carnality*, not about sexuality in society.

Let us now turn to some of the consequences of this discourse of silence—to the configuration of the available and non-existent discourses for sexuality and corporeality and thus of speaking positions within them. Reconfiguring this question as I have done opens up a new optic on what modernization might have meant for Russian writers of the twentieth century and beyond.

Other Modernization? Carnality and Eroticism in the Silver Age of Russian Literature (1890–1921)

In fact, one of the crucial issues to be addressed throughout the following chapters is the specific character of the birth of modern Russian literature and its position within world literature. Instead of exoticizing or othering Russia's intellectual history of the period (deciding that it is derivative of its French sources, for example), it must be argued that, in the so-called Silver Age, it set its own course on the basis of a unique synthesis of modernizing tendencies and all sorts of resistance forces already operating in the pre-revolutionary era.

Opening out this blending of the European and the local, I believe that it is crucial to discuss, for instance, in what ways the Russian symbolists were similar to or different from their earlier French counterparts (not just how they *derived from* them), or how the Russian fin-de-siècle decadents were distinct from similar cultural trends in Anglophone or Francophone cultures. Arguably, attitudes toward the carnal and the corporeal, toward sexualities and eroticism, could be important *litmus tests* to discern these differences and similarities, and to argue the new Russian variants proposed by the Silver Age and later as original cultural products, not as derivative from the West, although responding to it. That is, emerging Russian literary discourses on sexuality and corporeality were arguably completely modern and very well tailored to the Russian context, drawing on Western exemplars but by no means limited to them or derivative from them.

For example, the Russian decadents Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, his wife Zinaida Gippius, and their disciple Dmitrii Filosofov (following the philosopher Nikolai Fyodorov) firmly believed in what they called the imminent "transformation of sex" and predicted the abolishment of sexual intercourse ("the sexual act") and childbirth altogether. The body, they claimed, will somehow become sexless and immortal. Coitus would be replaced by a new form of individual relationships between what used to be man and woman that they failed to specify (*Хлыст* 203).

Later in her life, in one of her letters to Filosofov, Gippius would recall Vasilii Rozanov constantly mocking them at the Religious-Philosophical Meetings: "Come on, please tell me what on earth [a man and a woman] would *do* together [once sexual intercourse has been abolished]? *How* will they do it? Will they do something like that? Or maybe something like this?" At this, Rozanov would apparently produce some obscene gesticulation, but the decadent mystics would just, as Gippius confesses, "always be embarrassed and become dumb" (quoted in *Хлыст* 204). It is hard to imagine that writers in Anglophone cultures at the turn of the century would be preoccupied with the idea of transforming the "old physiology and old psychology" of sex in this radical fashion, and in a public forum—it would appear more as a party game than the serious challenge that it was intended to be here.[23] Yet I believe this exchange is quite symptomatic of what I have called the "discourse of silence" that the trio literally *lost their tongues* and could not find *words* to parry Rozanov's mockeries, even as they proposed radically new forms of social organization—the kind of innovation proceeding in the political sphere, as well.

In other words, while such literary and artistic phenomena and trends as decadence, Neo-romanticism or Symbolism could be described as transnational, the Russianness of the intelligentsia's sexophobia (i.e., fear of and aversion to sexualities) is hardly debatable. Yet such examples also document their awareness of these lacks, and their (sometimes comical, often failed) attempts to fill them.

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[23] For example, the reclusive aristocrat Des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Hyusmans' *Against Nature* (1884), the French 'decadent bible', appears to be relishing his memories of seducing women, despite his obvious misogyny and self-centeredness. Religion, for Des Esseintes

> had also aroused [in his soul] . . . *the illegitimate ideal of sensual pleasure*; *obsessions with both libertine and mystical mingled together,* preying on a brain which was tormented by the obstinate desire to escape the crass pleasures of the world . . . (*Against Nature* 90–91. Italics added)

It is obvious that Russian decadents were much more successful in escaping the carnal pleasures of this world than Des Esseintes—both in their writings and real life.

An early round of attempts peaked in the period of the Silver Age of Russian literature and culture, which gave birth to a variety of the intelligentsia's debates around the themes of love and the family, carnality and corporeality, sexualities and eroticism. The last three decades of the nineteenth century also saw a soaring interest of intellectuals and politicians alike in such social phenomena as prostitution, pornography, the thoroughly pathologized and demonized homosexuality and other sexual "aberrations" such as, for instance, sadism and masochism. Such authors as Dostoevsky (of his late period), Chekhov, and Sologub[24] all contributed to the formation of an authentically Russian discourse of burlesquing sexualities, viewing all forms of sex (including onanism, a.k.a. masturbation, attacked by Dostoevsky in his *Diary of a Writer* and in his portrayal of Nikolai Stavrogin's adolescent overindulgences in *Demons*) as shameful, ugly and malicious. These authors were backed by religious philosophers from Solovyov and Fyodorov to Berdyaev and Florensky who developed a uniquely Russian theory of sex and gender, femininity and masculinity, love and procreation that can be only characterized as aggressively sexophobic and misogynistic.[25] That is, while these initiatives paralleled those familiar from Western Europe, it is completely possible to trace these Russian developments as indigenous parallels, not inferior or derivative, but rather intensively creative responses to a particularly pronounced discursive absence.

It is also remarkable, but not entirely surprising, that this period could be characterized by the emergent intense interaction between the religious common people / *narod* (mostly sectarian rather than Russian Orthodox)[26] on the one side and the upper classes and intelligentsia on the other. This happened for the first time in history and brought about, to use the Bachelard/Foucault term again, an *epistemological rupture*, of which Bolshevik ideology appears to be just a byproduct or a stray offshoot. This *social* confrontation forced for the first time, I believe, a confrontation of the elite and the Church with the discourses of sexuality still

[24] I do realize that these authors belong to different historical periods and literary trends or movements but it is next to impossible to discuss the Silver Age without Tolstoy, Leskov, Dostoevsky or Chekhov as the likes of Sologub, Andreyev, Kuzmin and Kuprin produced most of their work in an intense dialogue with these literary giants of their immediate past.

[25] See Eric Naiman's discussions of misogyny and "gynocide" in the writings of Berdyaev, Solovyov, etc.: *Sex in Public* 35–45 or "Historectomies" 255–276.

[26] By some estimates, up to 35 million (!) of Russian peasants belonged to sects in the early twentieth century (*Хлыст* 37).

present in indigenous forms in the *narod*, while largely absent from elite and official discourses.[27]

In the political field, this rupture may be said to have manifested itself in the enormous "discursive formation" around the figure of Grigorii Rasputin, a Siberian *muzhik* and possibly a Khlyst in the past, who was an extremely close adviser of the Emperor Nicolas II and especially the Empress Aleksandra between 1907 and 1916. In the intellectual field, unprecedented fascination (or enchantment, in Jungian terms) with spiritual and sexual practices of all sorts of sects took place. It can be argued that the interest was mutual: many sectarians and Old Believers attended intellectual meetings, and they were invited to literary salons in Moscow and Petersburg. As Etkind reminds us, the famous poet and philosopher Vyacheslav Ivanov found a peasant woman somewhere in 1910: she was considered to be a "Khlyst Mother of God." He invited her to his lectures, and when she was asked if the lecture, full of scholarly terminology, made sense to her, she would reply: "So what, all is clear, names are different, and words are different, but the truth is only one" (*Содом и Психея* 246). The "mad monk" Rasputin was repeatedly asked—in all seriousness!—about his opinion of the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov or Dostoevsky's novels; Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, a Bolshevik intellectual and friend of Lenin's, recalled that, when Rasputin visited him once in his office around 1910, he saw a portrait of Karl Marx on the wall and asked his host who this person was. "This is him who armies of people should follow!," Rasputin then exclaimed prophetically and asked Bonch-Bruevich to introduce him to this bearded man (*Хлыст* 585).

Changing perceptions of carnality, sexuality and eroticism played a great role in this process: against the pervasive background of Orthodox culture and the lacunae in discourse predicated on it, both intellectuals of the upper classes and sectarians of peasantry seemed to be obsessed with one *idée fixe*: how to overcome the body, which was supposedly stifling the spirit. The official Church was also actively involved in this debate: the focus was of course on the nastiness of sexual intercourse and the urgent need to find some other method for "increasing and multiplying"

[27] Religious pluralism in the fin-de-siècle Russia and the peculiarities of Russia's modernization and secularization are discussed in the 2007 essay collection *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, edited by Mark Steinberg and Heather Coleman. Unfortunately, most contributors to this useful collection do not discuss the link between religion/spirituality and sexuality/corporeality in modernizing late imperial Russia, so this section might serve as an interesting counterpoint to the collection.

(*Хлыст* 102). One can even argue that this obsession was indeed a common denominator that allowed for a fusion of the progressive Silver Age intellectual and the *muzhik*, traditionally either repulsed by or indifferent to each other. Emasculation, both real/surgical and imaginary/metaphorical, thus became truly an ideal, albeit radical, solution for this fundamental anti-carnal, anti-sexual urge (various early science-fiction solutions also went in this direction). Both groups were eager to defeat nature and thus extend the dominion of culture, but while certain sectarians were ready to undergo quite real surgical castration, intellectuals, artists, journalists and Orthodox clergymen could not go that far and were prepared to emasculate themselves in the figurative sense, e.g., to refrain from having sexual intercourse and remain chaste in a purely spiritual marriage—just as such prominent intellectual couples as Andrei Bely and Asya Turgeneva, Aleksandr Blok and Lyubov Mendeleyeva, Dmitrii Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Gippius all did.

Another common denominator that helped to join these two seemingly disparate camps was the Russian genuine proclivity for mysticism and esotericism. Just as the above-quoted founding father of Old Belief Archpriest Avvakum would, Kondratii Selivanov (c. 1730–1832), the founder of the Skoptsy sect initially born as a heresy within the Khlystovstvo, was appalled by the promiscuous behavior of the Khlysty, especially by their practice of group sex. He proposed the most "modernist" solution—emasculation. In the first half of the nineteenth century not were only the males castrated (both testes and penises were normally removed), but females also often had their breasts cut off; clitorectomy was quite common, as well. Later in the century, women's bodies were thus "reformed" much more rarely. Etkind analyses the songs and rituals of the Skoptsy and concludes that for them "death was punishment for sex . . . Overcoming sex is a way toward victory over death" (*Хлыст* 84). In addition, if one thinks that lust is a disease, castration appears to be very adequate treatment of it. It could be almost called a "popular medicalization" of sexuality, when, instead of the loquaciousness of the Catholic confession discourse or the puritanical indignation at libertinism of the Protestants, in Russia a surgical removal of the genitals as reconstruction of the imperfect human body became a portent of the Russian version of modernization.[28]

[28] A most recent account of history of religion in Russia—mostly of Orthodoxy but also touching upon sectarianism—in the context of emerging modernization and secularization in the period is Chris Chulos's highly informative 2003 book *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861–1917*. Unfortunately, Chulos has little to

Skopchestvo, the ideology of the Skoptsy, is also curiously compatible with what has been called the discourse of silence in this chapter, as a modernization of millennium-old Orthodox ideas. In *Страды* / *Travails*, his magnum opus (first published in 1845), Selivanov, who was depicted by contemporaries as a man of few words, tells us about the mystical-intellectual defeat he once inflicted on a female Khlyst prophet:

> [I] rolled my spirit onto her (*накатил на нее мой дух*), and she fainted and fell on the floor . . . [after that she] came to and started telling me about a bird that flew around the universe to inform everyone that I am a god over all gods, a tsar of tsars, and a prophet of prophets. I said to her: "This is true. Beware, *don't tell anybody about it*, or else *flesh will kill you* (*а то плоть тебя убьет*)." (*Хлыст* 86; italics added)

Silence and abstinence are tightly linked for Selivanov; being talkative, on the other hand, implies being promiscuous and lustful. It is not surprising therefore that Etkind argues that "the Skoptsy's politics led the moods of Russian intelligentsia with its populism, feeling of guilt and striving to 'become simpler' by decades" (*Хлыст* 87). Rejection of one's own sexuality thus also remained much more important for Russian utopianism in all its manifestations than rejection of private property. I can only add to Etkind's apt conclusions that Selivanov's emasculation is a strategy for becoming both sexless and silent; as opposed to the proliferating discoursing about one's sexual life in Catholic countries, the history of Russian *skopchestvo* was marked by secrecy and reticence.

The experience of Russian sectarianism was, of course, reflected in Russian literature. Etkind draws an enticing line of succession from Pushkin's fairy tale *Сказка о золотом петушке* / *The Golden Cockerel* (1834) through Leo Tolstoy's *Холстомер* / *Kholstomer* (1886) and *Отец Сергий* / *Father Sergius* (1898) to Andrei Bely's *Серебряный голубь* / *Silver Dove* (1909). He also recalls, quite interestingly, that Rozanov compared Selivanov's *Travails* with Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1891). Tolstoy condemned *skopchestvo* ("оскопление хуже блуда" / "castration is worse than fornication," he would argue [*Хлыст* 99]) but many of his own ideas—such as the destruction of family and demonization of all sensuality and sexual intercourse—echoed the teachings of Selivanov and his followers, taking them as keys to a new world.

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say about sexual aspects of the modernizing village life in Russia, although does provide a short subchapter on family life of the peasants (Chulos 88–89).

One of the most interesting cases of the political and ideological manifestations of the *khlystovstvo* in Russia was the above-mentioned sensational story of Grigorii Rasputin. In *The Rasputin File* (2001), Russian journalist Edvard Radzinsky makes the case that what was most threatening in the association of the "mad monk" with the Empress Alexandra was much less his faith-healing than his hypothetical identity as a Khlyst. The sect's sexual practices (such as group sex, or orgies) were perceived as a threat to traditional social orders—they were *too* modern. Following Rozanov, Aleksandr Etkind draws a parallel between Rasputin and Selivanov, who lived 100 years earlier and is believed to have influenced the Emperor Pavel. One striking discrepancy between the two elders was that, while Selivanov was obviously a castrate himself, Rasputin was known for his male prowess; the still proliferating discourse about him in Russia (rumors, "anecdotes," literary works and even scholarly articles) has been invariably focused on his virility and sexual depravity. Etkind explains this discursive turnaround by a rather problematic shift from what he calls the eighteenth-nineteenth century model of a *depraved social top* (i.e., the upper classes)—*chaste bottom* (i.e., peasantry) to a new configuration toward the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: *enlightened top—depraved bottom*. In Etkind's psychoanalytical judgment, "Selivanov's absent penis has thus been transformed into the hypertrophied one of Rasputin" (*Хлыст* 597–598). However, Etkind contradicts himself somewhat when he points to the popular fascination with Rasputin's "purity of kisses" and the common belief during his lifetime that having sex with him would cleanse the souls of his sinning female partners and help them repent (*Хлыст* 587). Such a statement, however, does fit in with the old Orthodox paradigm of transforming corporeality into something more abstract.

Aside from being a quite real—and in most cases voluntary—surgical operation so many Russian sectarians underwent in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries, emasculation or castration can therefore also be read as a metaphor for different social groups attempting to modernize the country through overcoming sexual desire or drive and somehow perfecting the human body. Interestingly, while in Western Europe it was mainly women who found themselves the objects of medicalization in the era, in Russia it was for the most part men who underwent voluntary castration.

The cult of reticence, secrecy, and Aesopian language maintained by the Russian sectarians seems to have run parallel to the evolution of such self-censorship regarding carnality and eroticism in the literature and

culture of the upper classes: toward the end of the nineteenth century, these two subfields of production of culture suddenly opened up to one another and thus brought about the epistemological rupture of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Moving on to Case Studies: from Gogol to the Silver Age and Beyond

I have attempted to formulate a brief outline of the genesis and discourse space of suspicion and fear of sexuality in Russian intellectual history and literature, in comparison with its treatments in the West. Additionally, I have discussed some specific examples of how the strategies of silence and evasion evolved throughout the late eighteenth to early twentieth century, as well as certain precursors of these mental attitudes.

In the subsequent chapters of the monograph, it will be made clear that, from Nikolai Gogol to Ivan Bunin and up to the present, "mainstream" Russian literature seems to have adopted the strategic course for *pathologizing and burlesquing sexuality and eroticism*. In other words, the intent of almost any Russian author—be it Gogol in the 1840s with his necrophilia in *Viy*, distorted sexual and gender relationships in *Taras Bulba*, or *The Marriage*, or Sorokin in the late 1990s with Hitler copulating with Stalin's daughter in *Голубое сало / Blue Lard*—has been fundamentally antierotic and/or sexophobic.

In the above-mentioned Yuri Mamleyev's powerful and immensely influential novel *Шатуны / Vagrants* written in the late 1960s, we are still presented with a whole variety of sexual deviants portrayed virtually as burlesques: one woman masturbates with the help of a small goose; a young husband is so upset about his wife getting pregnant all the time that he constantly tries to murder the fetus with his oversized penis while making love to her; for yet another couple, sex is a form of confirming their obscure philosophic ideas, etc. This frankness is an unprecedented phenomenon in Russian literature and culture but would anyone call this book a contribution to the creation of the "Russian Eros" (Mamleyev 12–30, 52–56)?

To use Bakhtin's terms rather loosely, the heteroglossia of the novelistic discourse in Russia has been invariably short of any articulate voices that would try to refrain from pathologizing or demonizing human sexuality in very distinct and very limited terms. However, there has been little or no interaction between the growing Russian highbrow literary culture and a more sexually unrestrained, often lowbrow culture and criminal,

subculture of the era. The only exception one can find in Russian history is the Silver Age when these subcultures seem to have finally met and cross-pollinated each other. Subsequent chapters of this book are devoted to this period and to the ways the cultural field and *habitus* created then continued to produce impact upon Russian writing and philosophizing of the twentieth century to nowadays.

There have been some notable deviations from the norms established by the discourses of silence and burlesque that seemed the only discursive positions for this Silver Age and beyond: a few authors and critics have managed to write about eroticism, love, marriage, even homosexuality without bashful evasiveness or the infamous Russian *глумление* / subtle sneering at your opponent/interlocutor. Usually, however, this alternative thread in Russian literary history is associated by scholars with Vasilii Rozanov's philosophy of sexuality (although he obviously emphasized the procreative aspect of sexuality more than the pleasurable one), but in *Chapter 2* I will argue that an important predecessor of his may have been Nikolai Leskov, a younger contemporary of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy whose work contains subtle but powerful criticism of Tolstoy's extremism of *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Dostoevsky's metaphysical ideas.

Russia's reading public was thus in a particularly fraught position in the Silver Age, and continues to be so, when it comes to questions of modernization and joining the West: it should not only keep learning to admire Russian literature's canonized figures but also be able to "unlearn" its proclivity for shunning (keeping silent and silencing) and/or distorting (pathologizing or burlesquing) human sexualities. The thrust of this chapter, therefore, has been to point out the ways, in which classical and contemporary Russian literature should be held partly answerable for the virtual absence of sound discourses of sexualities in today's Russian culture at large.

CHAPTER TWO

GOLDEN SILENCES IN THE GOLDEN AGE: RUSSIAN ANXIETIES OF THE BODY AND SEXUALITY FROM GOGOL TO CHEKHOV

> Кстати о стихах: сегодня кончил я поэму « Цыгане ». Не знаю, что об ней сказать. Она покаместь мне опротивела, только что кончил и не успел обмыть запревшие <. . .>.
>
> А.С. Пушкин[1]

The previous chapter of this study argued for a lack of discourses of corporeality, carnality and eroticism in the late nineteenth-century's Russia and its intellectual climate in the Silver Age of Russian Literature (1890–1921). This chapter will extend that case into the domain of literature. Generalizations are always fraught with inaccuracies, but there are any number of scenes in the canonical (and non-canonical) literature of Russia's nineteenth century that demonstrate that the literati were indeed grappling with these discourses as they sought to represent the corporeal, carnal, and erotic in a world of discourse that offered them a narrow range of discourse options.

It is critical, I believe, to see what kinds of struggles these nineteenth-century authors faced in bringing their personal programs and experience into literary representation, since their examples remain formative for subsequent Russian literature at two successive turns of the century. After all, the authors chosen for this chapter—Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Chekhov and others,—are still generally hailed as great Russian humanists and exemplars of Russian culture; their characters still serve as role models for many educated people. No small number of intellectual Russians still learns from their favorite characters' experiences and

[1] This is a quote from Aleksandr Pushkin's letter to Prince Vyazemski dated October 8 or 10, 1824: "By the bye, about verses: today I finished the long poem *Gypsies*. I don't know what to say about it. Right now I feel disgusted with it, just done and haven't yet managed to wash my sweaty <-->." This is an example of how editors of Russian literature still prefer the three dots: Pushkin must have meant his perspiring scrotum (and used an obscene Russian equivalent for "balls"—*яйца*), but this posthumous edition chooses squeamish repression over the need for an explanatory footnote (Pushkin, web source).

borrows their favorite authors' aphorisms to apply to everyday situations. The passages that I will discuss briefly below thus need to be seen as examples of what Russian writers and thinkers may have faced when they tried to express these domains of experience. Each author's work shows clear signs of struggling to expand on existing discourses of corporeality and sexuality in their writing.

Seen from the European point of view, even the most Westernized texts among these authors still show clear deficits. Two lovers who would like to find the verbal means for discussing their intimate problems, for example, would find few resources in these literary exemplars—the kind of nuanced vocabulary for care, love, belonging and desire that characterizes Western classics like *Madame Bovary* is often lacking in the Russian texts. The texts show clear evidence of enormous cultural-linguistic gaps—or an alternate sense of style—as they vacillate between lofty pontifications about love and marriage (often marriages that seem shamefully sterile and/or pathologically "sexophobic")[2] and the vernacular, often vulgar or low-class, obscene or smutty expressions and words collectively known as *мат* (largely all the "mat" words are sex- or flesh-related in their connotations and etymology—just as most "four-letter words" in English). Educated speakers of Russian will be hard-pressed to find words between these two poles in the texts for their bodily desires and sexualities. This gap is precisely the interim territory that, following Vasilii Rozanov, I refer to as the *dot-dot-dot* or ellipsis / *многоточие* throughout the monograph.

Yet at the same time, there are a few authors since Aleksandr Pushkin who offered some words and expressions to bridge this stylistic/linguistic gap or impinge upon this *dot-dot-dot* territory. Later in this chapter, I will turn briefly to the one I consider the most important of these, Nikolai Leskov whose prose may represent a more liberal treatment of carnality and eroticism in Russian literature, expanding on those few moments in the work of Pushkin and his Golden Age coevals Yazykov, Lermontov, Kukhelbeker, among others.

The project of this chapter, then, is to show the literary experiments of the nineteenth century that complement the medical/scientific ones that I have traced in the first chapter. Titans of nineteenth-century Russian

[2] The term "sexophobia" will be used here to denote "fear and aversion to sex and sexualities," i.e., any non-reproductive, pleasurable sexual activities, be they homo- or heterosexual. It is closely linked to demonizing human genitals and genital intercourse, viewing those as dirty, disgusting and/or trivial.

literature as Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Anton Chekhov each tackle corporeality, carnality, and eroticism in ways that begin to overcome the silences about the body that the Russian traditions have passed on to them. The passages that I address below are meant to exemplify how their works prepared the way for the nascent erotic sensitivity of the Silver Age, even as they also still prefigure the reigning "sexophobia" of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. As I address these passages, I will again elide differences among what in the West might be different discourses (eroticism, carnality, corporeality, and sex, for example), because in nineteenth-century Russia, these discourses remained very close to each other, almost as overtly experimental discourses.

What I have called experimental, however, Dmitrii Galkovsky calls a lack, as he points to Russians' inability to express a full range of sexual and erotic experience—a "disease of the language," its "infantile," "vulgar and senseless stylization":

> How can a Russian give a meaning to "bedroom experience"?[3] Only via a vulgar and senseless stylization. This is a disease of the language. And the susceptibility to this sickness of meaninglessness is present in the language itself. The "best representatives" [of Russian literature] have gone too far along this path. But in everyday life it is all there as well: mincing manners (*жеманство*), restraint (*стеснение*), and suppressed (*затаённые*) childhood complexes—all very much due to the inability to speak. On the surface, it is sprawling around through torturing, corrupting the everyday language (*расползается коверканием бытового языка*) (Galkovsky 417–8).

And as we shall see later in this study, the sharp deficit of verbal means for conversing on sexual, erotic, or body themes has not significantly improved during the recent period of globalization and Americanization since the collapse of the Soviet regime.

That these Russian writers did not come closer to approximating the kinds of expression available in Europe's realist novels may be a result of Russia's physical isolation from Europe: unlike many Westerners, most Russians in this era (and almost until today) cannot claim what Anthony Giddens calls the "globalization of biography": only a minority even of the elite classes has ever been able to travel abroad. This isolation has its parallel in the fact that only about one-fifth of the population have a

[3] *Постельный опыт*: this is a standard Russian/Soviet euphemism denoting an individual's sexual experience.

regular access to the Internet, etc.[4] How these expressions were lacking is only becoming apparent today, as a great amount of sex-related popular literature, movies and documentaries have now found its way to the Russian-language markets; a considerable number of neologisms/borrowings from English have entered the everyday language use (such words as *sex appeal, petting* or *cunnilingus* are part of lexicons of adolescents and adults alike). That is, contacts with other cultures' discourses of the body have, perhaps, begun to fill the gap. Still, overall, it would be quite plausible to characterize Russian intellectual culture's reluctance or inability to liberalize and/or Westernize its discourses of sexuality as an avatar of *resistance to globalization*.

Yet from another perspective, many writers, artists, theater figures, and philosophers of the Silver Age resisted the kind of Westernization that might have given Russian culture the domains of discourse it lacked. The nineteenth-century writers I will be tracing in the next sections of this chapter saw the lacks, but were never entirely able to fill them.

Even more critically, there is little evidence that these authors took on the challenge of filling in these discourses. That decision is critical in light of the role that enlightened intellectuals were supposed to play in society. In a late interview, Joseph Brodsky (discussed in Chapter 6) compared the role of a poet in US and Russian/Soviet societies in a way that can be helpful here, looking for the relationships between the reading public and the literati. In Russia, he notes, literati had to become the leading "critics of society" because political opposition to the ruling regime (in the Western sense) had never really existed. In consequence, Brodsky notes, historical predestination amalgamates with the poets' own "vanity" (*Интервью* 615–6). The reading public, he believes, sees a *littérateur* as a person whose responsibility in the public sphere is to teach, to indoctrinate, and to be an ideologue. This sort of "social demand" requires writers (and literary critics like Belinsky, Pisarev, and Dobrolyubov) to serve as spiritual "gurus" in matters of national importance (witness Solzhenitsyn's memorable quip from the 1970s when he dubbed Soviet writers *слепые поводыри слепых* / "blind leaders of the blind").

Indeed, such authors as Turgenev or Tolstoy appear to have followed this pattern and viewed their role in society with more self-importance

[4] To quote Giddens: "Globalization is an 'in here' matter, which affects, or rather is dialectically related to, even the most intimate aspects of our lives. Indeed, what we now call intimacy, and its importance in personal relations, has been largely created by globalizing influences" (Giddens 95).

than their Western counterparts. Brodsky quotes a Pushkin line about the poet's status, a quip that his literary progeny seems to have thoroughly forgotten: « И меж детей ничтожных мира, / Быть может, всех ничтожней он ». // "Of worthless children of the world, he well might be the one most worthless" (*Интервью* 615). Indeed, writers and philosophers like Leo Tolstoy or Vladimir Solovyov have track records of bold statements on a variety of topics including Jews and Poles, gender and sex, science and technology. Yet their literature shows little detailed attention to discourses of sexual intimacy and eroticism, except as "overcoming the original sin," or in terms of odder utopias, such as eliminating sexual intercourse itself in order to build the purely spiritual future that might set Russia apart from the West and onto its own path of modernization. These authors whose legacies had shaped the literary field of the Silver Age era (as well as those of the subsequent periods) therefore did act as the kind of social visionaries that Brodsky pointed to—influencing, for instance, the Russian religious philosophy of the turn of the century (Konstantin Leontiev, Nikolai Fyodorov, Vladimir Solovyov, etc.), and playing a crucial part in the formation of the *habitus*[5] in which Russian Symbolists, decadents or metaphysical poets of the fin de siècle had to operate.

Yet because such writers did consciously wield the power of an intellectual intelligentsia, I believe that it is critical to consider how the literary images and philosophic concepts created by Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Solovyov are evidence of more than Russia's failure to Westernize. These arbiters chose to speak of sex and procreation rather than eroticism and carnality, which is particularly interesting as comments on the way they lived, their everyday habits, including their sexual/marital behavior.[6] As they were innovating how Russia expressed itself, then, they were making conscious choices about what needed to be represented—choices

[5] Bourdieu's terms (*habitus, field*, etc.) as applied to this monograph are defined in the *Introduction*.

[6] Several examples of this will be mentioned in this and subsequent chapters. The young Vasilii Rozanov was so preoccupied with Dostoevsky that he sensationally married Appolinariya Suslova, the latter's long-term mistress and, possibly, *femme fatale*, who served as a prototype of such characters as Nastassya Filippovna of *The Idiot* and Katerina Ivanovna of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Suslova was eighteen years older and abused the exalted youngster's feelings to the maximum. Aleksandr Blok and his wife Lyubov's tormented marriage was purported to be a real-life triumph of Solovyov's teachings about Sophia, the symbol of eternal femininity. Solovyov was in many ways a follower of Dostoevsky.

See Olga Matich's "The Symbolist Meaning of Love: Theory and Practice" for an account of "celibate marriages" and "triangular loves" involving the key cultural figures of Russia's Silver Age (Paperno 24–50).

which did not necessarily include the kinds of experiments specifically concerning carnality, eroticism, or corporeality that were more common in nineteenth-century Western literature.

Thus as I take up these examples of moments of representation that might call for expressions of these domains, I will have to take a broad view of authors and their texts, in order to assess what they say, what their experiments were, and what they might have achieved. To see what the literary texts do express requires us to consider what domains of experience the authors' lives included, as revealed in their correspondence, memoirs, (auto)biographies, interviews, diaries, etc. Their representations, therefore, relate not only to their Western literary exemplars, but also to the specific spaces in which they imagined the corporeal and erotic. These other texts will not provide an *explanation* for specific representations, but they can help characterize what kinds of experiments the authors saw themselves engaging in *within the Russian context.*

As we shall see in the brief examples I address below, authors such as Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Tolstoy did indeed act as socio-political visionaries, but made distinct choices in their willingness to confront Russian experience of the corporeal and the erotic, often choosing to use older formulae (burlesques) or to silence it rather than to take up Western tropes for eroticism and carnality or to move beyond social utopianism.

These authors thus leave a comparatively narrow tradition of representing sexuality that had later to be challenged by the literati, critics and philosophers of the Silver Age, who realized that much more radical experience of sexualized domains were present in socio-cultural phenomena like the sects and their ideologies (especially the Khlysty and Skoptsy).

As a pendant to this discussion, I will discuss briefly the views upon gender and sex of Vladimir Lenin whose political essays and writings are replete with allusions to the works of Gogol, Chekhov or Tolstoy, which argues in another way for the continuity between literary representation and political speech that Brodsky claimed. Lenin's stance on the body and sex was in many ways predetermined by the Russian literary tradition of the nineteenth century, even as his writings and political activities sought to define Russian/Soviet modernity and modernization (including modern discourses of the corporeal and erotic). That brief note on Lenin will also prove instrumental for my discussions in later chapters of this manuscript of such (post)Silver Age works as Sologub's "The Tsarina of Kisses" (1922) and G. Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom* (1938), which reject the Soviet ideology of gender and sexuality.

Nikolai Gogol's Anxiety about Sex and Marriage

It is quite possible that the history of literary discourses of sexuality in Russian literature begins with Nikolai Karamzin's famous pre-romantic novellas *Poor Lisa* (1792), *Sierra-Morena* (1793), and *The Island of Bornholm* (1793), all of which are generally canonized as revolutionizing the Russian literary tradition in a number of ways. The last work, a Gothic tale, is perhaps the most memorable for the present context, since it dwells on an incestuous love affair between two siblings of different sexes and ends with the author seemingly being unable to utter the word "incest" (he has been narrating the entire story in Aesopian language), sunk into a state of genuine horror ("I have learnt a horrible mystery—"). Textually, Karamzin (or, perhaps, his censor) replaces a physical confrontation with or representation of this perverse sexuality, a gothic cliché, with a long dash (« Остров Борнхольм », web source). This gesture marks the fundamental avoidance of such representations at the very start of Russian literature, even in a context where, in the West, the genre would have allowed various tableaux of horror to appear (even if not the word "incest" itself yet).

Aleksandr Pushkin, a disciple of Karamzin's, was the only Russian writer of the first half of the nineteenth century conversant in and open-minded about sex, judging by his poetry, prose and, last but not least, correspondence. Unlike so many of his colleagues in Russian belles-lettres, he never really attempted to pontificate or moralize on sexual matters—he opened the door for a Russian discourse on eroticism and corporeality. Unfortunately, Pushkin's frivolous and verbally exuberant eroticism (which permeated not only his writings but also his private life of a Russian *barin*/nobleman) remains unmatched in Russian literature to this day, as most of his followers in the nineteenth century were much more morbidly restrained and moralizing in presenting sexual behavior of their characters, while in much of the twentieth century the very idea of a liberated erotic discourse was rendered unattainable by the mere existence of the Soviet regime.

Among such foundational and canonical authors, in consequence, only Nikolai Gogol, one of Pushkin's younger contemporaries, managed, beyond any doubt, to touch upon the essential aspects of "Russian Eros" and sexuality. However, one of the problems with interpreting his oeuvre today is coming to terms with several levels of dark irony in his texts—especially with what may be termed *glumleniye* or *yurodstvovaniye*.

Dmitrii Galkovsky goes so far as to suggest that intellectual communication between any two random Russians is impossible in principle without a "subtle scoffing of your opponent." Indeed, in Galkovsky's judgment, the Russian word for "scoffing" or "jeering"—*glumleniye*—is extremely hard to translate adequately into English; it is one of those words that, in Galkovsky's opinion, describe Russia's "national essence." *Yurodstvovaniye* is a narrower term that means, literally, acting like a *yurodivy*, a Holy Fool or Fool-in-Christ (Galkovsky 135, 192–193, 249).

Needless to say, just as in some more contemporary authors, this ubiquitous ironic grotesqueness may easily interfere with an adequate understanding of this or that motif or plotline by a contemporary reader because of his/her deep engagement with distinctively Russian experiences, not necessarily reframed in ways more familiar to the West. In any event, Gogol's contribution to articulating some of the most crucial problems of the literary language of sexualities was immense. One of the most vivid examples of his portrayal of Russian relationships between the sexes is his comedy *The Marriage* (1842).[7]

Today's critics sense how essentially different Gogol's works are in terms of sexuality—he is seen in many ways as indeed different from his contemporaries, yet that difference is not necessarily seen as programmatic as I do here. Instead, one of the most influential readings of this play, along with the other of Gogol's works, is offered by Simon Karlinsky, in his *Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol* (1976), in relation to Gogol's biography rather than to literary traditions in the wake of Pushkin.[8] Karlinsky sees his task in unveiling Gogol's repressed, closeted homosexuality as a leitmotif of his life and creative activity. One may agree or disagree with Karlinsky's hypothesis (even the strongly Freudian critic Boris Paramonov confesses that Karlinsky "did not convince him 100%" [« Гоголь, убийца животных », web source]), while Mikhail Epstein notes that one of the lacunae of Karlinsky's text is his silence about the relation of Gogol's ero-

[7] Of course Gogol's other works also merit attention with regard to his bizarre ideas about sexuality: in the long story *Viy*, for instance, the narrator's fascination with the erotic appeal of the dead body of a young woman borders on necrophilia or, rather, necromania; *Taras Bulba* also contains a number of memorable scenes, in which sexuality is portrayed pathologically.

[8] An apt demonstration of Gogol's role in Russia's intellectual history of the nineteenth century is offered by James Billington in his classic monograph *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (Billington 325–59). For an up-to-date collection of articles on various aspects of Gogol's poetics, see *Gogol: Exploring Absence: Negativity in 19th Century Russian Literature*, edited by Sven Spieker (1999).

tism to his patriotism, i.e., to his mystical conception of Russia (« Ирония стиля », web source). Overall, then, the complexity of Gogol's artistic and erotic vision has too often been reduced to his hypothesized homosexuality rather than to his position as a public intellectual in a certain tradition.

Indeed, although Karlinsky mentions in passing such famous Russian treatments of Gogol as Dmitrii Merezhkovsky's *Gogol and the Devil*, Vasilii Rozanov's numerous essays, Andrei Bely's *Gogol's Mastery*, Aleksandr Blok's essay "Gogol's Child," and Vladimir Nabokov's book on Gogol, he never seriously engages any of these texts as representing a broader confrontation of the author with issues of sexuality and corporeality that Russian experience would suggest to literary interpretation. Instead, he somewhat casually dismisses their important socio-political insights with declarations such as "Rozanov's speculations about Gogol's possible necrophilia are surely wrong" (*Sexual Labyrinth* 283). As he perhaps justly ridicules Soviet "vulgar sociologizing" approaches to Gogol, Karlinsky's own approach may thus better be labeled as "vulgar queerizing."

No matter its limits, Karlinsky's chapter on *The Marriage* remains quite informative on the level of biographical details that allow us to reclaim a different interpretation of Gogol's literary choices. Karlinsky is quick, for example, to point to Podkolyosin's dormant homosexuality, yet grounding his argument solely on a deleted statement from an earlier draft of the manuscript when Kochkaryov tells Agafya about Podkolyosin's boss at work loving him so much that "he sleeps in the same bed with him" (*Sexual Labyrinth* 174).[9] At the same time, the critic fails to discuss Podkolyosin's fear and aversion of sexuality reducing it to his suspiciousness of a heterosexual marriage and of women in general. Karlinsky then goes on to provide his readers with a list of misreadings of the play in Russia as merely social satire, while not seeing the limits on his own interpretation. To him *The Marriage* remains merely a statement of the author's and protagonist's revulsion about marriage and of their misogyny, nonetheless closing his chapter by repeating Dostoevsky's opinion of this work as the most misunderstood and enigmatic one in all of Gogol (*Sexual Labyrinth* 179).

[9] This statement from the loquacious Kochkaryov is hardly a hint at Podkolyosin's homosexuality. Russians are in the habit of using all sorts of hyperbolic quasi-sexual rhetoric when they need to persuade their interlocutor of something. Gogol could have discarded this fragment for a number of other reasons, not necessarily because he had anticipated his censors' homophobia.

Russian critics do not fare much better in reclaiming the sexuality in this author's discourse. Described in the Soviet period as merely a satire of marriages of convenience in the emerging capitalist society, many critics still underplay the fact that the play is really about Russian social tradition, particularly about the utter absurdity of traditional gender roles and the striking inability of the sexes to communicate—the border between sex and marriage, as it would be seen in the West. In Gogol's world, a highly restrictive social system, sex and marriage are extremely social acts, perhaps more so than in the West. For example, men and women must employ all sorts of matchmakers or go-betweens to help them set up a sexual dialogue or a marriage contract. This is precisely the role assumed by Kochkaryov, Podkolyosin's friend, a recently married and already disappointed husband himself. Gogol wants his reader instantly to suppose that whatever Kochkaryov attempts in this role will be inevitably marred by his own negative marital experience and thus characterized by *glumleniye* at his hapless friend. All the discussions of marriage and family values between the characters—Kochkaryov and Podkolyosin, Kochkaryov and Agafia, Podkolyosin and Agafia, Fyokla and Podkolyosin—reveal that all the characters are tongue-tied not only about sexuality but almost any aspect of marital life, including procreation. This society is represented as lacking a social space for eroticism in its marriage rituals.

Galkovsky is certain that in *The Marriage* Gogol gave us the "alpha and omega" of "Russian attitude to love, Russian Eros and sex"; he calls it an "archetypal work." But the Podskolyosin-Kochkaryov conversation can be contingently divided into two parts: one is on pleasurable sex, the other is on reproductive sex. Thus I would also underscore Kochkaryov's utter inability to find the words necessary to describe intimacy between the spouses. He has to use a large amount of ridiculous diminutive suffixes and, of course, the archetypal *dot-dot-dot* to articulate anything emotional, pointing to a lack of words he cannot fill:

> KOCHKARYOV: And when you have a wife, you will not recognize anything around you: here will be a sofa, a little doggie, some little siskin in the cage, there will be needlework . . . And just imagine: you are sitting on the sofa—and suddenly a little girlie (*бабеночка*), so pretty, is sitting next to you and with her little hand [Gogol uses the diminutive form "ruchka" here, which sounds like a parody of Pushkin's famous "nozhka"/little foot—A.L.] . . .
> PODKOLYOSIN: Oh, devil, when you think about it, what sort of little hands there exist! Just like milk, you know, brother.
> KOCHKARYOV: What are you mumbling! As if they had only little hands! . . . (*Будто у них только что ручки!*) They, brother, also have . . . Why would

> one even talk about it! They have only devil knows what not (*У них, брат, просто черт знает чего нет*).
> PODKOLYOSIN: And to tell you the truth, I really like it when a pretty one takes her seat next to me.
> KOCHKARYOV: Ah, you see you cracked it yourself. (*Сочинения* 101)

It is not quite clear what exactly about women that Kochkaryov thinks Podkolyosin has "cracked." Indeed, the whole conversation consists of hints, omissions, slips-of-the-tongue—and a rather bizarre invocation of the devil. The only meaningful and informative word mentioned in a more modern sense may be "ruchka," a reference to female hands. Translation does not help this dialogue, either: the translator has to insure the English reader does not get an impression that the characters suffer from speech impairments or mental deficiencies. The obliqueness of Gogol's language is caused by his characters' conscious disparagement of or inability to discuss both reproductive and pleasurable sexuality; he is clearly ironizing their positions, as well.

The next passage moves to the other side of the coin: the sweetness of bearing and raising one's offspring:

> KOCHKARYOV: Just imagine that you have little kiddies around you, not just a couple-three but maybe six, and they all look like you, like peas in a pod. You are now all alone, a court councilor [a Russian civic rank at the time—A.L.], a head clerk or some sort of a boss, God knows what; and then just imagine: these little baby head clerks, all those tiny little rascals are all around you, and some little imp is reaching to you with his little hands and pulling at your whiskers, and you will only go, like a doggie: "Bow-wow, bow-wow!" Is there anything better than that, just tell me?
> PODKOLYOSIN: Yeah, but they are also big mischiefs: they will damage everything, throw the papers around.
> KOCHKARYOV: Let them be naughty, but they all look like you—this is the thing.
> PODKOLYOSIN: Isn't it really funny, the devil take it: this little dumpling, this puppy—and here he is, looking like you.
> KOCHKARYOV: Is that funny—of course it is funny. (*Сочинения* 102)

This dialogue reveals an extremely important trait of the Russian literary discourse of sex as it supposedly represents a social reality: the woman does not seem to exist, or if she is introduced, then she is instantly demonized (as in Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*, for instance). Another level of Gogol's inimitable irony coloring this passage is the linking of the fertility of marriage to the archetypal Russian man's bureaucratic productivity as a "public servant"—the former will hopefully help enhance the latter.

There is clearly a political double reference in this near-joke, almost invisible in translation. Podkolyosin is, in this sense, incapable of being "as brave as the Russian people" in issues of sex, in no small part because he cannot express or verbalize his innate desire to create a family. Gogol's dark irony builds upon Podkolyosin's employing of his friend Kochkaryov as a matchmaker, but the latter himself reveals himself as just as tie-tongued and bilious about marriage and family life, which he clumsily hides under his "holy-fooling" (*юродствование*) and scoffing (*глумление*) of his infantile and bashful buddy. Acting as a Menippean and social satirist, then, through these dialogues Gogol deconstructs any sense that there exists a "Russian Eros" and paints an extremely gloomy picture of the relationships between the sexes and attitudes to sexuality in the stratum of Russian society that ought to serve the state, which correlates with his dark views of almost everything in Russian mores and social realities.

Simon Karlinsky aptly summarizes this aspect of Gogol's macabre comedy:

> None of the motivations or purposes associated with perpetuating the institution of marriage in human society is even remotely present in the thinking of the main characters of this play. Love is nonexistent, companionship between a man and woman is an impossibility, sensuality (as personified by Zhevakin) is a pitiful joke, and the joys of procreation and parenthood are ridiculed . . . as a comical and selfish urge. (*Sexual Labyrinth* 178)

In other words, in Gogol we indeed have a powerful anatomist of "Russian Eros," as that impossible utopianism renders a class almost inarticulate about its own goals, but not a public intellectual who wants to remedy that situation, as a Pushkin-style creator of a literary language of sexualities. Instead, whenever we read Gogol, we must be ready to be confronted with his multi-layered irony and *glumleniye*, his representation of characters who lack the language to deal with these issues—the social critic, not someone pointing to a new language. Gogol's œuvre may indeed be crucial for grasping its groundbreaking insights into the relationships between the sexes, yet he does so by showing characters who *lack* discourses of sexuality and eroticism in their own lives. This lack, however, needs by no means be interpreted simply as the rejection of heterosexual society by a closeted homosexual; it is diagnostic of a larger social problem.

It is this point at which Gogol remains standing in his work, unwilling to move beyond criticism in treating erotic themes without his trademark grotesqueries and absurdities, as is revealed in his Petersburg novella "Nevsky prospect" (1835), which adds a significant element to the class-

bound diagnosis I am making here. Unlike *The Marriage*, "Nevsky prospect" is not devoted solely to marital behavior and customs: the main purpose of Gogol's story is simply to travesty sexual attractions as such, especially as they structure social relations. The author shows us how unavailable eroticism, carnality, or corporeality are to his characters, who immediately tie sex to society. Two buddies—a poor artist Piskaryov and a wealthy lieutenant Pirogov—walk along the Nevsky Avenue and look under passing women's hats. When they see two attractive young women, they decide to chase them: Piskaryov goes after the brunette, while Pirogov follows the blonde. The narrative that starts with sexual urges then bifurcates into two successive subplots, motivated by the social impulses that each have inculcated into themselves.

Piskaryov slashes his own throat after a series of disappointing encounters with the object of his attraction who turns out to be a prostitute (despite her tender age of 17). Caught in a typical Gogolian mix of dream and reality, he is unable to comprehend how filthy lust and divine innocence can co-exist in one seemingly angelic person, and so he suffers a nervous breakdown upon trying to propose to the girl (making the story about marriage too, after all!) and getting rejected. The main proof of the brunette's lustfulness in Piskaryov's eyes is of course her categorical refusal to be his muse while entertaining herself with embroidery and needlework—she is domestic rather than spiritual, as an artist would require.

The second prong of the story is no better. Albeit he is a womanizer and not a bit as timid and bashful as his artist friend, Pirogov's story echoes Piskaryov's in its society-based absurdity: the ladykiller gets infatuated with the blonde who is actually a German artisan's young wife. As he tries to seduce her, the husband comes back home and the adulterer gets badly and humiliatingly beaten.

Gogol's "moral" at the end is clear and simple: Nevsky avenue is associated with depravity and mercantilism and the only way to avoid indulging in both is "not looking under women's hats." The story's message is thus very representative of a middle-class world of false respectability, misogynistic and anti-sexual at the same time: women are portrayed as almost subhuman (a ghost-like whore and an inane, but good-looking, German blonde—an interesting ethnic slur, as well), while the tale's implicit solution for such social problems is to abstain from being attracted to these agents of humiliation, destruction and death. Sexual attraction *per se* is travestied, demonized and pathologized in Gogol's world (*Петербургские повести* 5–29).

Gogol's work will be referred to throughout the subsequent chapters, but at this point it is important to argue that with his macabre, twisted, darkly humorous portrayals of women, sexual attraction, and the institution of family, Gogol has hewed to the tradition of burlesquing and travestying the limitations of the middle classes through showing their inability to cope with carnality and eroticism, a critique to be later developed by such authors as Dostoevsky and Chekhov. He does take on the role of political commentator in his explicit ties of sex to social norms, but in so doing, he does not introduce into works like these the kind of social eroticism, flirtation, and erotic self-questioning that one finds in the French and English literature of the day. He has taken up the role of social critic of the middle classes, but he does not necessarily pose an alternative to either the utopianism of the artist, denying female sexuality, nor the gross carnality of the womanizer—ultimately, he shows a class inarticulate about sexuality in their personal lives.

Leo Tolstoy and the Discontents of Great Humanism

Other prominent Russian writers of the nineteenth century did not necessarily follow in Gogol's track when they wrote about love, but one could characterize their representations of sexual attitudes in the same classes, although the class is now shown as morbid and tense rather than in more ironic terms. Like Gogol, the more realist of these authors do not offer, overall, much of an expansion of extant discourses of sexuality and corporeality because they, too, are interested in a class critique rather than in sexual identities.

Leo Tolstoy is of particular interest in this respect. Usually, critics interested in his views on sexuality choose to dwell upon *The Kreutzer Sonata*, wherein he arguably displays absolute sexophobia, purportedly a sign of his turn away from society and toward his particular kind of social utopianism. But it would be more instructive to begin with his most widely read novel *Anna Karenina* (1875–77) before moving on to this later work.[10] In *Anna*, Tolstoy does not yet take a "journalistic twist" that would put the emphasis on representing the real. Instead, he was still aiming to write a "Great Russian Novel." But this work is replete with the sexophobia that is

[10] Gary Saul Morson most recently explored the poetics of this novel in detail in his 2007 monograph *Anna Karenina in our Time: Seeing More Wisely*. It is especially important that Morson pays special attention to the representations of love, sexuality and eroticism in the novel (Morson 71–72, 112–115).

ascribed to the upper and middle classes in traditional Russian literature. The "ideal relationship" of Kitty and Levin, for instance, is deprived of any overt sexual connotations whatsoever; the spouses are not described as being in a loving emotional relationship or as physically attracted to each other. Readers learn only from Levin's diary confession that he is in the state of "non-virginity." The couple's wedding night is not discussed; their marriage seems to rest on pure spirituality, characterized by Tolstoy's pontificating on an ideal Russian family.

The other side of the class-bound social field here is represented in much the same way as Gogol had done. The novel's other couple, the adulterers Anna and Vronski, have not managed to avoid sexual intercourse, which the author characterizes in the pathological terms already attributed to the inhabitants of Nevsky Avenue. Significantly, Tolstoy never dwells on the sexual act itself—he never moves to innovative portrayals of sexual relationships; his innovation is to show social consequences in the characters' feelings *post factum*, displayed, however, in visual and verbal signs pointing immediately to the acts seen as social pathologies by the perpetrators. Vronski's jaw is shaking, he feels they are murderers near the corpse of the man they just killed. This "corpse" represents their love. Further on in that initial post-coital scene, Tolstoy compares them to robbers who frisk the corpse for a possible gain. This simile is stunning indeed: intimacy between a man and a woman is presented as a base, shameful act, equivalent to murder and robbery (indeed, we know that Anna is cheating on her husband but does her unfaithfulness fully justify Tolstoy's morbid comparisons?). As Tolstoy writes:

> [Vronski] felt the very same thing that a murderer must feel when he sees the body he has just deprived of life. This body, which he deprived of life, was their love (*тело, лишенное им жизни, была их любовь*), the first period of their love. There was something hideous and awful in the reminiscences of what had been paid for by this frightening price of shame. The shame of [Anna's] spiritual nudity pressured her (*стыд пред духовною наготою своей давил* [*Анну*]) and was transmitted to him. But despite all the horror of the killer in front of the body of his victim, it is necessary to chop into pieces and hide this body, it is necessary to make use of what the murderer gained through this murder.
>
> And with viciousness, as if it was passion, a murderer thrusts himself against this body and pulls it, and cuts it; this was the way he covered her face and shoulders with kisses. (*Анна Каренина* 157)

In passages like this, Tolstoy was already reflecting the kind of sexophobic attitudes of that class in his prose, long before the purportedly "extremist" period of his creative activities which critics attribute to his own turn

toward asceticism. This sex act was anything but erotic in the minds of its two participants.[11]

In *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890), the situation of the represented discourse is not much different: Tolstoy comes up with a more explicit image for purity, his idea of the "angelic state" of humankind, which would lead to a suspension of reproduction and its ultimate destruction.[12] The discussion of sex in this story is represented in the morbidly hysterical tone of Pozdnyshev the protagonist with whom Tolstoy seems to have identified, or at least who, as he expects, will be a point of identification for the middle- and upper-class readers:

> Ask children, ask a non-corrupted girl (*у неразвращенной девушки*) . . . You claim that *it* [probably, sexual intercourse is implied here, italics added—A.L.] is natural? It is natural to eat. To eat is satisfying, easy, pleasant and not shameful from the very beginning, whereas *it* is smutty, shaming and painful. No, *it* is not natural! And an unspoiled girl (*девушка неиспорченная*), I am convinced, always hates *it*. (*Крейцерова соната* 156)

Tolstoy's Pozdnyshev is convinced of the impending destruction of humankind because of its decadent eroticism; having sex with one's spouse is, of course, equivalent to adultery:

> Humankind is going to cease to be? Can anyone, whatever his vantage upon the world is, really doubt it? In fact, in all the church doctrines the end of the world will come, and in all scientific doctrines the same thing is inevitable. So what is so strange about the same outcome in the moral one? [. . .]
>
> The Gospel words—he who looks at a woman lustfully (*с вожделением*) has already committed adultery (*прелюбодействовал*) with her—refer not only to other men's wives but also—and most importantly—to one's own wife. (*Крейцерова соната* 158–9)

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[11] Gender and sexuality in *Anna Karenina* in relation to Tolstoy's protomodernist aesthetics are aptly analyzed by Amy Mandelker in her 1993 book *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the Woman Question, and the Victorian Novel*.

[12] The lively debate on family, gender and sexuality that *The Kreutzer Sonata* caused is discussed in detail in Peter Ulf Møller's *Postlude to The Kreutzer sonata: Tolstoj and the debate on sexual morality in Russian literature in the 1890s* (1988).

Sigrid McLaughlin has helpfully noted Arthur Schopenhauer's (of *The World as Will and Representation*) influence on Tolstoy's Pozdnyshev: the sexual act is viewed as almost a crime; love disappears once the act has occurred; the end of human life is a beneficial result of sexual abstinence (McLaughlin 233–38, see also Rancour-Laferrier's *Tolstoy on the Couch* 77).

My approach to sexuality in Tolstoy echoes Olga Matich's: she links *The Kreutzer Sonata* to the postcoital scene from *Anna* and Pozdnyshev to Vronsky: "*The Kreutzer Sonata* is a blowup of the postcoital scene in *Anna Karenina* . . . Even the physical detail that typifies Vrosnky's feelings of torment in that scene, the trembling jaw—travels to *The Kreutzer Sonata*, characterizing Pozdnyshev's demeanor before the murder. Tolstoy represents both couples as criminal collaborators, with the difference that Vronsky's crime is metaphoric" (*Erotic Utopia* 51).

The standard readings of Tolstoy that I do not share often come from psychoanalytic criticism, such as Daniel Rancour-Laferriere's book *Tolstoy on the Couch*. Firstly, unlike Rancour-Laferriere, I see no evidence or logic to the claim that the writer "felt guilty about the heterosexual act because he felt it was an expression of hatred toward the woman . . . because in fact he hated his mother, raged against her for her sexuality and especially for her perceived abandonment of him in early childhood" (*Tolstoy on the Couch* 152). Such a simplistic explanation sheds no light either on Tolstoy's own sexuality or on the ideology he was trying to promote in his texts. Is the critic trying to say that Tolstoy was a misogynist, i.e., did he feel guilty about sex because he hated women or, quite the opposite, because he thought that sex inflicts violence on them? In any case, the "matricidal impulse," or "matricidal hostility," do not seem to explain any sexuality-related motifs in Tolstoy's oeuvre; in fact, these terms appear misleading and largely irrelevant to his texts.

Secondly, Rancour-Laferriere's claims that the writer's "new puritanical morality had a sadistic component aimed at his wife" and that "he was indulging in [sadism] just by having sex with her" appear not very well grounded biographically or historically. The critic cites Sofia's discontent with Tolstoy continuing to have sporadic sex with her and impregnating her while preaching abstinence in his texts of the *Sonata* period, but the more urgent question is what evidence Rancour-Laferriere has of Tolstoy's having had "sadistic" sex with his wife? The fact that Tolstoy had intercourse with his wife at all may only affirm his own admission (quoted by the critic) that he was a "sinful man" who could not "master his ardent temperament," whose "spirit [was] willing and the flesh weak" (*Tolstoy on the Couch* 190).

Quite predictably in the Russian cultural context, Tolstoy's portrayal of middle- and upper-class hatred and fear of sexuality is accompanied by representations of their (and his own) concomitant distrust of natural sciences and medicine in particular. Pozdnyshev, for example, seems

to believe in a conspiracy of doctors who maintain brothels in order to have enough syphilis patients for their practice. His narration is replete with inane accusations directed at physicians and biologists who purportedly concentrate on some "non-existent leucocytes" instead of helping to resolve what he considers the much more important problem: how to make family life entirely sexless and based on brotherly/sisterly respect. This statement echoes Tolstoy's own scornful denial of the recently discovered existence of leucocytes, a public statement at the height of his fame.[13] Another target of the Great Russian Humanist's righteous wrath at the time was the era's increasingly sensuous music (hence the story's title): it is blamed for arousing illicit sexual desires. At this point, critics are led to see in the story its author's own prejudices.

Finally, Father Sergius in Tolstoy's eponymous novella (1898) was an aristocrat but now is a celibate reclusive monk in his mid-fifties, famous all over Russia for his chastity and healing prowess. Despite his age, he is a good-looking man of a youthful appearance. A few years ago, he axed his own index finger using the shock of pain to quell his lust for a lascivious woman, but contrary to what Freudian critics have said about it, obviously failed to emasculate himself: some time later, the recluse is seduced by his own 22-year-old patient, an insane but voluptuous young woman, in a stunningly absurd and grotesque scene.

The scene is no less fascinating than the more often quoted finger-axing one. It is strikingly absurd and written with a dark, sarcastic irony, perhaps more characteristic of Dostoevsky or Chekhov than Tolstoy, especially in his late period. The novella was completed in 1898, but Tolstoy never published it in his lifetime. He wrote to Chertkov that it is really not so much about "struggle with lust," which is just an "episode" of it, but about a "struggle with fame" (*Собрание сочинений* 475). But Sergius is much more successful in taming the latter than the former, as he cannot resist the charms of the girl almost three times younger than himself.

Tolstoy seems to be content that concupiscence is invincible and, whenever an opportunity presents itself, a human being cannot really keep it in check. Not even the same axe that he used to chop his finger off seven years ago is of any help this time (*Отец Сергий* 439–440).

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[13] In my opinion, Olga Matich's insistence on the influence of degeneration theory and other psychopathological and medical discourse of the time upon Tolstoy is somewhat undermined by Tolstoy's fear and distrust of doctors and medical science. Nevertheless, I concur with Matich that, among other things, "beneath Tolstoy's condemnation of sex lay the fear of pathology and physiological decay" (*Erotic Utopia* 31).

Tolstoy's advocacy of anti-sexual, anti-erotic ideologies takes on a more critical face if one takes into consideration some biographical facts about his own personal experience and class position. The biographical Tolstoy apparently had a strong sexual drive; his later aversion to sexual discourse by no means meant Tolstoy's personal lack of experience in sexual and social matters. Late in his life, as Maksim Gorky recalls, he would always

> [Tolstoy would] talk about women, quite a lot and willingly, as if he were a French novelist but always with the roughness of a Russian *muzhik* . . . Today he asked Chekhov:
>
> – Did you use to lead a dissolute life in your youth (*сильно распутничали в юности*)?
>
> Chekhov smirked disconcertedly and, tugging at his little beard, said something inarticulate; and then Leo Nikolaievich confessed, staring at the sea:
>
> – And I was a tireless <. . .> (*Я был неутомимый* . . .)
>
> He pronounced it regretfully, having used a scabrous *muzhik*'s word (*соленое мужицкое слово*) at the end. (Gorky. *Собрание сочинений* 262)

This seemingly offhand anecdote is really a crucial conversation for my argument here, involving three central—and very different—figures of Russia's literary landscape at the turn of the century: Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Gorky, all meeting in an acknowledgment of experiences that find little nuanced representation in their works.

But what these masters of Russian literary language really show is the distance between their own abilities to discuss sexuality and their class positions. The real question is do they have enough *words* not to be tongue-tied about it, within their own class positions as public intellectuals? Gorky (the memoirist) persistently compares Tolstoy's manner of talking about sex to that of a commoner / *muzhik*, which is a new, modernizing twist, reflecting his generation's version of that class position. As discussed in the previous chapter, the *muzhik*, in the eyes of writers of Gorky's generation, is no longer a chaste, sexless figure but, quite the opposite, has become a depraved, lascivious creature who uses foul language that Gorky is ashamed to reproduce, despite the fact that it was the great Tolstoy who had in fact pronounced it! Even the canonical author could not authorize certain language in the sphere of *litterateurs* whose experience and identities were tied closely to a certain class position.[14]

[14] More recently, Tolstoy's sexual hypocrisy was attacked with trademark swagger by contemporary author Eduard ("Edichka") Limonov in his *Дневник неудачника / Diary of a Loser* (1982):

It is critical to note here that this reticence is not grounded biographically, in experience, but rather in conventions of representation. After all, Chekhov (discussed below) was a frequenter of brothels and certainly had a lot of sexual experience in his youth, but he is too bashful—or maybe just short of words?—to discuss it with the demigod of Russian letters. Finally, Tolstoy himself obviously regrets the lustfulness of his young days but, again, does not have enough words to describe it to his younger friends in terms appropriate to his class position and station and uses a *мат* term (probably *ёбарь / fucker*)... These absences in their life anecdotes parallel the lacunae I point to in their literature, as well, I believe, and to their own positions as public intellectuals who speak from and to a very specific span of middle- and upper-class readers.

I would now like to dwell more closely on one of the final chapters of this author's *magnum opus*, the novel *War and Peace*, to argue for the persistence of this literary tradition of sexophobia in another way, with another reference to how Russia's public intellectuals react to the presence or absence of these discourses in these literatures.[15] Marveling at the well-known scenes of Natasha and Pierre's family happiness, the conservative Russian philosopher Konstantin Leontiev (1831–1891) questions Tolstoy's position as an ultimate "critical realist" in terms that again echo the class positions represented in this literary tradition, calling his realism "dirty" and "unpleasant."[16] A brief quote from the Tolstoy text may suggest precisely what position he might be questioning:

> When Nikolai and his wife came back to look for Pierre, he was in the nursery holding his infant son who had just woken up on his huge right palm and *messing about with him* (*тетешкал его*). On his broad face with an open toothless mouth a merry smile was fixed...

If Leo Tolstoy lived today, I would hit him with a log in his head for his kitchen moralism, unparalleled hypocrisy, for the fact that he did not describe in his great works how he fucked (*переебал*) a fair amount of peasant girls in his estates. (*Дневник неудачника* 166)

[15] See George Clay's 1998 book *Tolstoy's Phoenix: From Method to Meaning in* War and Peace for a detailed account of the peculiarities of this novel's poetics.

[16] My approach to Leontiev on Tolstoy is informed by Olga Matich's analysis of Leontiev's 1890 essay "Analysis, Style, Trend: About the Novels of Ct. L.N. Tolstoy." Leontiev compared Tolstoy to a "graphic scientist-artist in an anatomical theater... Leontiev's description also... sheds light on Tolstoy's fascination with bodily mutilation and his penchant for voyeurism, what Leontiev called 'excessive peeping' (*излишнее подглядывание*)" (*Erotic Utopia* 45). For Leontiev on Tolstoy, see his *Analiz, stil' i veianie: O romanakh L.N. Tolstogo* and his "Vizantism i slavianstvo."

– The main thing is that he is such a tender father,—Princess Maria said . . .
– Well, Pierre nurses them [his children] so wonderfully,—Natasha said.—He says *his hand was just created to fit the baby's little bottom* (*у него рука как раз сделана по задку ребенка*). Look at it.
– *No, only not for this*,—Pierre suddenly said, laughing, gripping the child and passing it over to the nurse. (*Война и мир* 285. Italics added)[17]

Obviously, what happened there was that the baby suddenly defecated on Pierre's hand. This is corporeality at its funniest, with a fecal act used to symbolize what a "tender father" might do—quite the kind of class-crossing reference that Tolstoy would have recourse to, just as he did in describing his own sexual habits.

Here is Leontiev's comment on this passage, calling attention to what he considers a definite social break, taking Tolstoy's utterance as reflecting a reality that did not need reflecting:

> When Pierre is "messing about" with the baby (why not just say "nursing it"?), and the baby suddenly *soils* his hands—this is not a bit necessary and proves nothing. This is dirt for the sake of dirt (*грязь для грязи*), "art for art's sake," naturalism for the sake of itself. Or when Pierre in the same scene smiles "with his *toothless* mouth." This is even worse. What is it for? This is disgrace for its own sake. First, babies don't soil (*не марают*) their parents every minute; second, Pierre is not old enough to necessarily have no teeth: he might as well have had some. This is not sane realism; this is more like a "nasty habit," similar to the one Russian commoners have when they never open a white door by the handle but "soil" its surface with their fingers. (Galkovsky 271)

Leontiev explains what is at stake here by reference to what he calls the *махровость* / *double-dyed character*[18] of Russian literature, the kind of class break in discourses (especially those for eroticism and carnality) which was uncharacteristic of Pushkin but which was acknowledged in

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[17] The Russian verb Tolstoy uses here is of some rare dialect: « тетёшкать. » It is very hard to translate into English but it is definitely unclear why he didn't just say « нянчит » / *is nursing*: maybe due to the fact that he has Natasha use this verb later in this conversation.

In addition, it is not quite clear whether Leontiev understood Tolstoy's statement about the "toothless mouth" correctly. It is quite possible that Tolstoy meant the baby's mouth, not his father's.

[18] *Махровость* is yet another word that is difficult to translate. Leontiev probably means excessive, exuberant naturalism; a "heavy touch" in depicting natural phenomena; what Galkovsky refers to as Tolstoy's unnatural, unpleasant realism. Leontiev's concept echoes what I have highlighted in this study as *grotesque burlesques* in representing eroticism and corporeality in Russian literature.

Gogol's work and then picked up and expanded by Tolstoy in other ways. In his evaluation, this discourse violates what we might call the duty of the novelist as public intellectual, given that it is not up to the social purpose of the novel. From the present perspective, it is also hard not to note also that Tolstoy's exuberant prose reveals his choice to represent a deep-seated contempt for the corporeal unless it is related to raising one's offspring: the chief function of Pierre's hand is to fit his baby's buttocks as he merrily laughs when it defecates on his palm. In this moment of corporeality, this upper class person has in some way "gotten back to the basics" of a peasant (what in the Russian context is called *опрощение*). Or perhaps for a middle- or upper-class audience to *see* sexuality, they have to see a peasant—a very different interpretation of Leontiev's statements implying class positions?

I would extend Leontiev's argument to Pierre's wife Natasha, as she is portrayed late in the novel. Readers remember that, up to this point in the narrative, she was a passionate young woman who took care of her looks and manners; she was in love with Andrei Bolkonsky and wanted desperately to have sex with him, but for Tolstoy, Andrei was weak, that is, "unfitted" to such exertions, and so he certainly had to die. What kind of Natasha do we see at the end of *Volume 4*, though, once she has become a wife with a proper place in society? There is nothing wrong in her marrying Pierre and bearing four children but, once again, Tolstoy's representation of femininity should raise questions about what discourses belong to which classes. This "great humanist" here replicates the point of view of a real class-bound, almost misogynist reader:

> Natasha . . . had grown *stout and large* (*пополнела и поширела*), to the extent it was hard to recognize a slender and active Natasha of old. Her face . . . no longer had that constantly burning fire of animation, which used to be her charm. *Now one could see only her face and body; the soul could not be seen at all.* One could see only a strong, beautiful and fertile *cow* (*сильная, красивая и плодовитая самка*) . . .[19]
>
> Natasha . . . *abandoned all her charms*, including the strongest one—singing. She quit singing precisely because it was a strong charm. She, as they say, *had let herself go* (*опустилась*). She never took any care of her manners, refinement of her speech, her looks in front of her husband or her dress . . .

[19] Here Tolstoy uses the Russian word *самка* / *female* but definitely in a more sexist, derogatory sense. This is why I chose the word *cow* instead. After all, *female* is a biological term, whereas Tolstoy, as noted above, was known for his mistrust of biology and medicine.

> She didn't like society in general but she valued the company of her relatives . . . the people she could meet uncombed and wearing a nightgown, stepping out from the nursery with a happy face to show them *a diaper with a yellow spot instead of a green one* and listen to their consolations that the baby was doing much better. (*Война и мир* 278–281. Italics added)

Following Leontiev's insightful critique, the question is this: why did Natasha, formerly a young, attractive woman, have to get stout and look unkempt? What does the narrator mean by telling us that her soul "could not be seen" any longer? Why is turning into a "cow" supposed not a completely negative outcome for a woman, all at the expense of her losing good manners and any interests outside obsessing in the color of her children's feces?

There may be no straightforward answers to these questions, but to some readers today, these ideas about family, child-bearing, and gender roles appear sexist. I would suggest instead that Tolstoy is again falling into that break between being able to represent a young society female and a woman who has openly made a transition to sexuality, as her children attest. In this depiction, Tolstoy is much less a "humanist" than a social "critical realist" in the tradition of Gogol. Yes, she had lost her first love, but overall, she is marked in the novel as having a more or less successful marriage—with children, but not with an erotic life. And in consequence, she looks like a peasant, thus putting off the question of eroticism to the other side of a nineteenth-century class boundary, reflecting again patriarchal takes on sexuality, gender and corporeality. Yet putting them into the context I have been drawing here, this picture again suggests that the author has recourse only to what are considered peasant discourses about the carnality of procreation, if that carnality is not to be judged as evil. Again, Tolstoy's strategy of representation points to a distinct Russian tradition, one that lacks other images of maternity, such as the many madonna images used in the West to signify a happy, corporeal mother.

That Tolstoy chooses to represent such a break rather than trying to overcome it can be proved in another way. An interesting example of Tolstoy's translating prowess highlights his awareness of this break: he was known to have appreciated Guy de Maupassant's short story "Le Port" and so translated it into Russian. In trying to make it "decent" for Russian readers, however, Tolstoy recklessly distorts the text, in one sense impoverishing Maupassant's prose to the point where it is no longer Maupassant's text but rather Tolstoy's. He feels free to erase not just individual descriptions of a female body (breasts, buttocks, legs, etc.) that suggest

the odalisques of Western art, but also to rewrite the story's plot, erasing the key theme of incest from it. Galkovsky exclaims with sad irony: "Russian 'realism.' Not only cannot they [Russian writers] write about [eroticism and sexualities]—they can't even TRANSLATE [writings about sex]" (Galkovsky 187). This statement might be truer than even the critic suspects, but only in light of class-bound discourses for sexuality. A text from the French could not be rendered "realistically" within a Russian context that did not have equivalent social positions.

All these examples demonstrate that Tolstoy represented his class's attitude to the corporeal, the sexual and the erotic as rather morbid and tense, and that his "conversion" to a more ascetic later view was less a conversion out of a class position than a reversal within it. In his espousal of a utopian position about sexuality, he began to espouse the thought that abstinence is the only solution to many social and interpersonal problems human beings encounter. Even though such ideas were not widely refuted in the late nineteenth century, Tolstoy here reveals himself as very attuned to rather conservative, patriarchal ideas about sex and gender. And with that adherence, he adopted the rhetorical tropes about corporeality and sexuality that I have been pursuing here: he still deals with these themes in a discourse mixing lower-class burlesquing and middle- and upper-class silencing of sexual and erotic things. He never denies sexuality, given his personal history, but he still does not care to work out correlates to Western discourses of eroticism, even at moments when it would be useful for translating.

The legacy of Dostoevsky offers us a different case, as he acknowledges other class positions.

Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Reproof of Onanism and Sensualism

The question of the writer as a dominant political public intellectual takes on a different face in the case of Dostoevsky, who deals much less from the upper-class social position that Tolstoy worked from.[20] With nearly an entire lack of a world-class philosophy, psychology or ethics in nineteenth-century Russia, the literary sphere was invested with a lot of expectations,

[20] For example, a useful comparison of Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's views on marriage and family is made by Liza Knapp in her 1996 book *The Annihilation of Inertia: Dostoevsky and his Metaphysics* (Knapp 167). As Emil Draitser noted, however, the similarity between the two authors is that "Tolstoy and Dostoevsky refer to sex as something highly despicable that evokes revulsion . . . or as a destructive force" (Draitser 117–18).

which persist almost into the present. Russian literature thus still bore the burden of providing resources for the would-be emergence of a more public sociopolitical sexual discourse in Russia.

The work of Dostoevsky is an important development in literary portrayals of sexuality. In this author one encounters, for instance, more direct expressions of lustfulness or "sensuality," albeit of those of insects: this is the way Mitya Karamazov describes his attraction to Grushenka quoting a Schiller poem (*The Brothers Karamazov* 107–8). The protagonist of *Notes from the Underground* confesses to being "lustful as an insect," a figure that at least makes him marked as sexual yet still not a peasant. Today everybody assumes that insects cannot "feel" in the way that human beings can, but Russian writers of the late nineteenth century must have thought otherwise—or at least found in such expressions new resources to speak biologically.

Dmitrii Galkovsky marvels at a neologism introduced by Chekhov who, incidentally, was a medical doctor: "Chekhov called it [having a sexual act] *to cockroach* [Russian *tarakanit'*—a verb coined by Chekhov from the noun *tarakan*—A.L.]. A 'lustful insect' was a common expression in the second half of the nineteenth century. But is an INSECT really lustful? It is but a mechanism—passionless, dumb, and scientific" (Galkovsky 491).

Most recently, Ronald LeBlanc offered an excellent account of entomological and zoological metaphors in Dostoevsky: "In Dostoevsky's portrayal of sexual relationships . . . it can quite often be the female partner who functions as the predatory spider and the male who serves her unwilling prey." The researcher notes that female predatory types invariably compared to spiders and/or tigresses and/or hyenas include Grushenka and Lise Khokhlakova (of *The Brothers Karamazov*). Alyosha, on the other hand, is likened to a dove and a chick (*Slavic Sins of the Flesh* 78–79).

To be sure, like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky hardly ever gives his readers a more or less "healthy" erotic relationship in his novels. One can even argue that, despite their thematic diversity, Dostoevsky's books are characterized by a dearth and mere lack of imagination in the representation of love and eroticism, judged against the norms of European literature. The minute Sonya achieves some "spiritual intimacy" with Raskolnikov—and, holding her breath, is hanging her bijouterie crucifix on his neck—all we hear in response is his famous mocking statement: "Oh, now I will be saved, khe-khe"[21]—and this is the most the reader is allowed to know about their intimacy in verbal terms.

[21] *Khe-khe* is a Russian interjection used to express an ironical laugh.

In fact, all the "negative" characters in this author's works are endowed with what he calls "sensualism": Stavrogin in *Demons*, Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, the concupiscent Fyodor and Dmitrii Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*.[22]

Mitya is, of course, a much more ambiguous character than his father, but his lasciviousness seems to be at the heart of all his problems; in other words, in portraying "karamazovshchina" as destructive, the author seems to single out its proclivity to "lustful" behavior (a.k.a. "hedonism") as one of its major characteristics. This is confirmed by Rakitin when he reacts to Alyosha wondering why Grushenka wants to "see" him: "If you are voluptuous deep inside you, what about your uterine brother Ivan then? He is a Karamazov too. This is the essence of the Karamazov question: [you are] lustful, money-grabbing and yurodivy (*сладострастники, стяжатели и юродивые*)!" (*Братья Карамазовы* 83).

Similarly, all the young women described as attractive (in a conventional social way) are, as a rule, extremely unhappy in their sexual lives and prone to self-destructive behavior. Ironically, the characters with whom readers are expected to sympathize are portrayed as almost entirely indifferent to sex or even asexual: Shatov in *Demons* is able to maintain his marriage for a few weeks before his wife runs away and is eventually seduced by the ubiquitous lady-killer Stavrogin. Alyosha Karamazov is so angelic in his behavior that one has to resort to "reading between the lines" to come up with hypotheses concerning with whom he is in love, Katerina or Grushenka, or both, or maybe someone else. According to his friend Rakitin, Alyosha is a "Karamazov indeed, to the full . . . a virgin who has experienced so much . . . a voluptuary by your father and a *yurodivy* by mother . . . this is why Grushenka told me: 'Bring him to me, I will make sure I take his little cassock off' " (*Братья Карамазовы* 83). Just like Grushenka, the readers would also like to know more about Alyosha, but his creator never delves too deeply into his carnal desires or anxieties (if any).[23]

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[22] Alyosha the "male virgin's" sexuality is explored in detail recently by Susanne Fusso in her 2006 monograph *Discovering Sexuality in Dostoevsky* (Fusso 69–79). Along with LeBlanc's chapter on Dostoevsky in his 2009 monograph (*Slavic Sins of the Flesh* 40–97), this book is one of the most standard, up-to-date accounts of sexuality in Dostoevsky; I hope that my brief notes complement Fusso's study via adding several new perspectives, such as the representations of solitary sex (masturbation) in his work.

[23] See *A New Word on* The Brothers Karamazov, a 2004 essay collection edited by Robert Louis Jackson, for more information on and analysis of various poetic and thematic aspects of the novel, including sexuality, gender, and corporeality.

But what about Stavrogin, Dostoevsky's ultimate sensualist? Does his portrayal denote an advance in representation for Russian public discourses?

Typical for any number of critics who conflate representations with historical realities, Galkovsky uses this memorable character to illustrate his provocative claim that "Russian culture is inclined to onanism."[24] He justifies such claims in terms of a biographical fallacy, starting by quoting the young Dostoevsky's (at 26) attack on Russian "dreaminess" that transforms a man into some creature of the "neuter gender"—a "dreamer." This archetypical man's overly developed imagination places him into a dream world, while he becomes apathetic and inactive in/insensitive to the real one. The other side of that appeal is in the novel as a problem: Dostoevsky mentions sexual attraction to "most captivating women" in his philosophizing at least twice, which allows Galkovsky to suppose that he implies not just a certain "spiritual or emotional state" but also "a definite type of sexual behavior," a mood that can be dubbed as "onanistic/masturbatory mood" in both a broad, metaphoric sense and in the narrow sexological one (Galkovsky 61).

More significant is the evidence in the text itself. Dostoevsky goes on to relate masturbation explicitly with the preponderance of the French language in Russia's educated classes: the "horrible physical habit of childhood" is equated with the linguistic inability to express oneself in one's mother tongue. French, for a Russian, is "dead, morbid, stolen"; the person who studies it too hard since early childhood is thus doomed to "forever be melancholy as if from some sort of impotence—just like those elders-youngsters who suffer from untimely physical exhaustion due to their nasty habit" (ibid. 62). This is an interesting correlation between a social type and a certain image of corporeality.

Yet Galkovsky then shows the whole gallery of "embittered onanists" throughout the writer's oeuvre in more medical-pathological terms, rather than pursuing the correlation I do here of discourses and social politics.

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[24] Galkovsky may well have lifted this application of masturbation to Russian culture from Georgii Ivanov's outstanding book of "poems in prose" *The Decay of the Atom* (1937). The "onanism" of Russia's consciousness is a recurrent theme in the Ivanov text: "Ah, this Russian, stirring, ruffling, musical, masturbating (*онанирующее*) consciousness. Always circling around the impossible like mosquitoes around a candle. Laws of life grown together with the laws of sleep. Eerie metaphysical freedom and physical obstacles at every step" (*Распад атома* 254). It would be safe to suppose that by "the impossible" Ivanov means the themes of carnality and eroticism. "Dreaminess" in Galkovsky seems to be just a variation of Ivanov's "laws of sleep."

He starts with the unnamed protagonist of *Notes from the Underground* whose suppressed erotic fantasies bring about his tortured nocturnal existence and culminate in the "sado-onanistic" humiliation of the prostitute. His next example is the short story "Кроткая" / "The Meek One" (tellingly subtitled a "fantastic story"), where the narrator/protagonist (obviously, a failed littérateur who likes to quote Goethe and thus show off his philological proficiency) is apparently insane and unable to tell the imaginary from the real any more. That narrator's own 16-year-old wife is part of some sort of literary material for his dreams; she commits suicide because she cannot endure being transformed into a character and see her own life turn into a literary plot. The narrator confesses at the end, observing his young wife's corpse on the table, that he "has had enough material" for his masturbatory fantasies (for example, the scene where he furtively watches his wife being courted by a former colleague from the military), while she was expected to "wait for a while" ("Кроткая," 340–375). Obviously the young woman did not want to wait for him to finish with his fantasy and defenestrated herself.

"The Meek One" is in many ways a typical Russian narrative about love and marriage. Despite the story's theme, there is not a hint of the carnal, corporeal or erotic in the text. We don't know what the narrator or, most importantly, the girl looked like, why they were attracted to each other (if at all). Perhaps the Russian titan deemed all these details superfluous to the narrative: after all, he does let readers know that the man was 41 years old, while the girl was 16, which has to imply that he is *a priori* a depraved sensualist and she is his victim (one recalls how much more complicated it is in the case of Nabokov's famous couple—Humbert and Lolita, although it is hard to make any assertions for works one hundred years apart). However, Dostoevsky may have wanted to insinuate that the narrator is so insane that he is simply unable to take note of any bodily traits (such as appearances) at all.

This series of characters traced by the critic as pathological culminates in Nikolai Stavrogin of *The Demons* / *Бесы*, who is believed by some readers to be a semi-conscious self-portrait of Dostoevsky. His destiny, according to Galkovsky, is "suicide as actualization of onanistic fantasies" (Galkovsky 63). Here is purportedly the character's confession, which—perhaps for the deficiency of the procedure of confession in the Russian Orthodox Church discussed in *Chapter 1*—he decides to mail out to three hundred provincial newspapers after he gives it to Tikhon the Elder:

> Not my meanness I liked but the ecstasy of sensing my baseness (*упоение мне нравилось от мучительного сознания низости*)... I am convinced that I could have lived my whole life as a monk despite the beastly voluptuousness which I have been endowed with and which I have always provoked [in others]. Having indulged—until I turned sixteen—with unusual immoderation in the vice, to which Jean-Jacques Rousseau confessed (*предаваясь до шестнадцати лет, с необыкновенною неумеренностью, пороку, в котором исповедовался Жан-Жак Руссо*), I ceased doing it the very minute I wanted to stop—in my seventeenth year. (*Бесы* 644–645)

This is a decadent in the Western mode, obsessed with self-observation. Not surprisingly, the chapter "At Tikhon's" was never published in Dostoevsky's lifetime, given its prurience. Still, it is evidently crucial for understanding Stavrogin. As the passage is drawn, his vice seems to be not in that he has raped the little girl and led her to suicide, but in that he has made this story up. The girl may not have existed, which is why he "suddenly" tells Tikhon at the end: « Я, может быть... действительно много налгал на себя » / "I have, it may well be, vilified myself in front of you" (*Бесы* 658). The transgression is showing something that has not been shown before.

In other words, the demonic Stavrogin has thus completed his public image as the ultimate sensualist, showing the Russian reader a type from the West in Russian disguise and taking that type seriously: he has shared the soul-wrenching pedophilia-induced child suicide story. In a nutshell, this is his masturbation fantasy retold to his intrigued audience, Tikhon the elder, and he is going to share it with three hundred provincial newspapers.

What is interesting in Dostoevsky for my topic is the centrality of this type of suppressed sexuality and eroticism to Russian culture. However, the treatment of sexual themes by both Dostoevsky and contemporary critic Galkovsky remains very schematic: if a person is "endowed" with a strong sex drive, for instance, be it the drive to have intercourse with a partner or to masturbate, he or she is somehow defective, invariably at fault, sometimes even inhuman, a monster of sorts (just like Stavrogin or Fyodor Karamazov). A morbid, grotesque portrayal of the carnal and the erotic thus underpins both authors' creative projects (110 years between the release of *The Endless Deadlock* and late work of Dostoevsky notwithstanding). It is irrelevant to Galkovsky that masturbation is no longer considered a pathology it used to be in Dostoevsky's times. Rather, it appears crucial to him that intellectual/literary onanism is a witty and apt label to be applied to Russian culture. Sex and corporeality therefore continue to

be used as a pathologizing cliché: just as the French are erotomaniacs and Germans—sadomasochists (Galkovsky points this out only half in jest), Russians are, by the same token, onanists as opposed to simply interested in healthy carnality.

Another concept exposed to "gloomy" theorizing in Dostoevsky is female attractiveness as part of his idea of "beauty." In Mitya Karamazov's ecstatic monologue about the sensuality of insects, mentioned above, the character discloses his own concept of sexuality veiled under this idea. An admirer of Schiller, Dostoevsky believed that "beauty will save the world" and, as seen in Mitya's "confession in verse," by "beauty" he meant, among other things, a man's object of sexual affection (in Mitya's case, this was of course Grushenka, which is a paradox, since she is portrayed as a voluptuous "fallen woman": how might she save the world?). This concept is also closely related to Dostoevsky's belief in some sort of a metaphysical deity, without which the world would collapse since "everything would be permitted." "God," according to Mitya, "gave us only riddles," and therefore "beauty" is fearful and indefinable. There is beauty in the "ideal of the Madonna" but the depraved Mitya is ready to see it in the "ideal of Sodom" too. The key thing about "beauty" is its Manichean mysteriousness: "Here the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart" (*The Brothers* 108).

Finally, yet another dimension of Dostoevsky's treatment of carnality and eroticism is the recurrent invocation of all kinds of *yurodivy / Holy Fools / Fools in Christ* in his novels. Most of his martyr-like female characters are to this or that extent *yurodivy*. They include Sonya Marmeladova, a soul-searching sentimental prostitute in *Crime and Punishment*, Maria Lebyadkina, the object of Stavrogin's marriage-discrediting designs in *The Demons*, and Lizaveta Smerdyashchaya ("The Stinking One"), the town madwoman and Smerdyakov's mother allegedly raped by Fyodor Pavlovich the libertine as a result of a drunken bet. Smerdyakov himself seems to be a *yurodivy* too but in fact may be someone different—an ascetic and deceitful castrate / *Skopets*.[25] Finally, his hedonistic father, Fyodor Pavlovich, is a *yurodivy* "inside out" with all his *glumleniye* at his interlocutors and family members through acting like a Holy Fool ("Quit

[25] It is an open question, however, whether major Russian sects (such as the Skoptsy) are so different from the mainstream Church or from the Old Belief. Rozanov, for example, thought they were "in essence, no more separate [from the Orthodox Church] than a bough is separate from a trunk" (*В темных религиозных лучах* 23).

your *yurodstvo*," Zosima the Elder suggests to him at one point).[26] Before turning to Smerdyakov and the old Karamazov, two occurrences of the institution of the *yurodivy* in Russian history must be addressed that will illuminate this point.

First, the cult of Fools in Christ was a Russian version of West European buffoonery. In ancient Russia the wandering clowns, *skomorokhi*, were the closest equivalent to the West's buffoons, but by the era of the golden and silver ages of Russian literature this institution became rudimentary. Their very existence contradicts the heart of Russian culture, known as it is to be very communitarian and collectivistic, whereas such people as *skomorokhi* and the *yurodivy* embodied individualism, i.e., what might be called the "cult of heroes." The *yurodivy* were in fact characterized by a very high level of personal freedom, freedom of expression and individuality, persisting in this form at least until the October Revolution. This is why Dostoevsky had such an acute interest in them: the phenomenon of a flourishing Russian culture in the nineteenth century that produced such figures as Pushkin and Dostoevsky is inexplicable without the *yurodivy* cult underpinning it. Certain Holy Fools were actually canonized by the Church; Galkovsky describes maybe the most respectable saint, Serafim Sarovsky (a Pushkin contemporary), as a *yurodivy*.[27]

Second, in his account of Grigorii Rasputin's *khlystovstvo*, Aleksandr Etkind mentions a book by Archimandrite Aleksii (Kuznetsov), *Yurodivy Saints of the Russian Church*, which was read in 1915 by the Empress (who obviously sought some sort of justification for her favorite's lasciviousness) and others in high society. The cleric argued that, in certain saints, "their *yurodstvo* manifested itself in the form of sexual licentiousness" (*Хлыст* 600). The book nonetheless failed as a doctoral dissertation at a Theology Academy in Petersburg and was since then thoroughly forgotten. The "sexual virtuoso" Rasputin's belonging to the Russian canon of saints or *yurodivy* notwithstanding, the possibility this book posed looks

[26] Some of the old Karamazov quips are very hard to translate adequately into other languages: Russian cynicism and glumleniye can be very subtle. For example, in the very first phrase he lets out in the elder Zosima cell, Fyodor Pavlovich derisively addresses the elder as *священный старец / holy elder*. The old buffoon is on target as Dostoevsky parenthetically lets us know that "Alyosha winced as he heard this 'holy elder'" (*Братья* 42).

[27] Galkovsky quotes Sarovsky's *yurodstvovaniye / glumleniye* at a pregnant woman who arrived to seek his spiritual advice but he opted to show her how to carry a child when she will be in later months of her pregnancy doing it in deliberately grotesque, mocking wriggles of his body imitating pregnancy (Galkovsky 245). It is important to note that *yurodstvovaniye* (acting like a yurodivy) is a synonym of *glumleniye* (acting like a skomorokh); these are two very close modes of behavior and thinking (ibid. 249).

quite captivating at a first glance, but ultimately is not very productive. Rasputin is not a good example of the *yurodivy* anyway; he was largely the opposite: a charismatic and cunning man who artfully exploited his "common people" and sectarian background to become a major player in the Russian political scene. Dostoevsky's Holy Fools, male or female, are all wretched, meek creatures, for whom sex is all about violence imposed on them by abusive sensualists—just like Sonya in *Crime and Punishment* who becomes a prostitute to help feed her family ruined by her alcoholic father, or a righteous Alyosha Karamazov running the risk of being seduced by the voluptuous Grushenka (quoted above).

For the purposes of this brief survey, the two *borderline* characters in Dostoevsky's work are much more interesting: Fyodor Pavlovich, an immoral, depraved hedonist who acts like a *yurodivy* for his own (or his author's?) ends, and Smerdyakov, his murderer, a pitiable epileptic who lays a book by Isaac of Nineveh (a.k.a. Isaac the Syrian) on his table before committing a martyr's suicide.[28]

Fyodor never talks thoughtfully; he raves constantly, but the readers quickly learn that, just as he unloads his loquacity upon his audiences, this extremely unconventional *yurodivy* actually blurts out quite a few insights that his author felt the readers should be exposed to. I will address just one of those relevant to this work. At the very end of his sojourn at the monastery, the old "sensualist" tries to make up for his "irreverent" behavior earlier that day and recklessly attacks the Orthodox clerics for a rumored use of the Khlysts' "model" for group confession (infamously followed by group sex in that sect's ritual called *радение* / *spiritual bath*):

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[28] Isaac the Syrian (d. c. 700) was a theologian and Eastern Orthodox saint most remembered for his writings emphasizing asceticism and "love of one's neighbor." The narrator informs the readers, among other things, that Smerdyakov is wearing spectacles toward the end of his life, to the dismay of Ivan visiting with him. This is a hint at Saint Isaac: he nearly lost his vision at the end of his life as well. Smerdyakov's asceticism is undoubtedly akin to that of Isaac; both of them are upset about the corrupt world's crude mores but are powerless to change anything. It is also remarkable that Smerdyakov doesn't really read the book but uses it to cover the money to be handed out to Ivan. However, this character is much more complex than an ascetic or a *yurodivy*: having learned Ivan's atheistic theory (once there is no God, everything's permitted), he confesses to having killed Fyodor in order to get hold of the money and start a new life "in Moscow or abroad." As he is studying the French language, it is a possibility that he has been toying with this idea until the very end (*Братья Карамазовы* 625–646). In addition, Smerdyakov is likened to a Skopets several times throughout the book; his homicidal wrath at Fyodor Pavlovich's depraved lifestyle would be then quite understandable (*Братья* 130).

> Holy fathers, I am appalled by you. Confession is the great ordinance I worship and am ready to kiss the ground to, while here [in your monastery] in the cell everyone is kneeling and confessing aloud. Is it even allowed to confess aloud? The holy fathers have established confession should be whispered into one's ear—only then your confession will be a sacrament, and it's been this way of yore. If not, how can I explain to him in front of everyone that I am, for instance this and that . . . um, I mean this and that, you understand (*что я, например, то и то . . . ну то есть то и то, понимаете*)? Sometimes it's hard to say it, you know. Isn't it a scandal, that's what it is! No, fathers, this way one will soon be dragged into Khlystovshchina with you (*в хлыстовщину втянешься*) . . . I will write [a complaint] to the Synod shortly, and will take my son Aleksei back home . . . (*Братья* 92)

The narrator then explains that Fyodor Pavlovich is relying on "vicious rumors" about elders abusing the sacrament of confession.

As is usual in late Dostoevsky, the narrator is scarcely an omniscient one, and his comments are inconsistent and hardly illuminating. There are several fascinating layers of meaning in the old libertine's mockeries that again point to levels of representation of sex and corporeality in very traditional Russian ways. First, Fyodor implies confessing to concupiscence, i.e., sex-related sins. Second, he points to the linguistic inability to express oneself, i.e., exactly to the absence of the models for the conversation between a priest and his parishioner. When he gets to the sensitive subject of one's confession, however, he literally stumbles (albeit self-consciously, mockingly), while the author chooses to use ellipses three times. Third, the old man juxtaposes the rituals of the Church with those of the Khlysts—and he hints that the latter are less hypocritical and more genuine. Finally, Dostoevsky—unwittingly perhaps—exposes the clerics' inability to parry any of Fyodor Pavlovich's allegations, to formulate any counter-argument; their sluggishness and unwillingness to change things, i.e. to modernize. This passage is therefore indeed a wonderful illustration of my earlier comparative historical sketch of the Russian Orthodox Church's silencing the carnal and the corporeal.

To summarize, although Dostoevsky's oeuvre is replete with psychologically and sociologically complex portraits of his contemporaries, his treatment of carnality and eroticism is rather schematic and unoriginal, and the imagery and discourses he has available still hew closely to traditional norms. Nevertheless, a close reading of certain scenes involving some of his most deplorable characters (such as the old Karamazov berating the clergy or Stavrogin falsely confessing to Tikhon the Elder) might in fact produce deeper insights into this author's complex vision of humanity, including deeper rationales for the certain presence of sexuality and

corporeality. In this sense—in his ability to show types beyond normal representations of the age—Dostoevsky's legacy must be considered as a crucial pre-modern phenomenon in the history of Russian literary discourses of the carnal and the corporeal. In addition, he was one of the first writers to take note of the sexuality of commoners in a more nuanced fashion (namely, by interrogating new variants of the *muzhik* and the prostitute), thus creating borderline characters like Smerdyakov or Sonya Marmeladova, even as he largely failed to elaborate on their corporeality and carnality. He resorted instead to treating these issues moralistically and as purely spiritual.

The Range of Sexual Freethinking: Between Turgenev and Chernyshevsky

An example of what must have been seen as a critique of the upper classes rather than an exploration of sexuality is the work of Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883). Although this author lived in Europe for most of his career and befriended the likes of Gustave Flaubert and Prosper Mérimée, most of his best known works do not offer many developments beyond scenes highlighting the sexual and corporeal themes established by Pushkin, Lermontov or Yazykov. Neither do these works seem to echo ideologies of sexual freethinking found in contemporaneous French literature, with which he was evidently very familiar. In Russia, one of the clichés forever associated with Turgenev's name is *turgenevskaya devushka* / "Turgenev maiden," usually found in discussions of his novella *Assya* (1858) and several other novels and short stories. The term implies a chaste, but passionate, romantic and idealistic, young woman who patiently awaits her "prince," the one and only love of her life. It has been actively used by literature teachers in Soviet grade schools mainly to set up a true "role model" for female students.

What if this prince is never going to show up? Turgenev seems never to have explored this option or provided his readers with answers. One may also suppose that if and when the prince finally appears, the experience may often be quite traumatic for the young woman, given that the "prince" may simply be unable or unwilling to "rise to the occasion." What if the young woman is someone like Turgenev's Assya herself—a "hot-headed," "strange" seventeen-year-old woman who always *чудит* / "behaves eccentrically" (Turgenev 101)?

The novella's plot is very simple. The narrator—forewarned by Assya's elder half-brother Gagin—hesitates to respond to her passionate and fear-

less declaration of love. When the following morning he finally makes up his mind (he clearly is attracted to Assya) to reciprocate her feelings, it is too late, since the brother and sister have already hastily left town and cannot be located (Turgenev 85–141).

It is very important for Turgenev to inform his readers that Assya is the daughter of Gagin's father and his mother's maid, a peasant woman named Tatiana (perhaps a nod toward Pushkin's heroine of *Onegin* who was, however, by no means a commoner) who categorically refused to marry the father after his wife's death. Ironically, even before the narrator learns about this from Gagin, he catches himself thinking of Assya's natural demeanor as that of a "purely Russian girl, and a girl of the common people, almost a lady's maid" (Turgenev 102). Her purity and absolute inability to flirt with the protagonist/narrator reveals Turgenev's utopian belief in the above-mentioned "chastity of common Russian people."

Due to her parentage, Assya is considered not a full member of the aristocracy and therefore cannot be portrayed (in Turgenev's world) as openly sexual or coquettish. And yet Turgenev exposes the big secret of a society based on such sexual lies: his first-person narrator (with whom he surely identifies himself) is attracted to her body erotically; he cannot help thinking about her figure being like "little Galatea by Raphael" as he is struggling with love-induced insomnia (Turgenev 101). In any event, the two characters' mutual attraction appears doomed from the very beginning, as their creator is obsessively class-conscious and unwilling to present a "happy love." In addition, for Turgenev, elaborating the sexual attraction between Assya and the narrator (the erotic component of the story) is, I would claim, of lower priority than reproducing the "chastity myth" and depicting Assya's lofty moral ideals—most famously, "flattery and cowardice are the worst vices" (Turgenev 113). Incidentally, it is perhaps largely the latter—cowardice—that prevents her beloved from reciprocating her feelings.

Apart from the brief remark about Assya's Galatea-like form, Turgenev's readers learn very little about why the two characters were sexually attracted to each other. At the same time, they are minutely briefed about Assya's parentage, upbringing and, most importantly, moral principles. One may suggest that Turgenev's answer to the challenge of representing sexuality in this otherwise masterful work is arguably this reticence (or silence).

When *Assya* was released in 1858, it was reviewed by a young critic and author who ironically referred to the novella's narrator as "Romeo" and called his behavior toward Assya "trivial" and "rude" (*пошлая грубость*).

The review was entitled "Русский человек на *rendez-vous*. Размышления по прочтении повести г. Тургенева «Ася»." The loquacious reviewer suggested that "Romeo" would have done better if he had chosen to "enjoy the mutual pleasures of a happy love" and tried to connect the latter's "confused" and "stupid" actions with Russia's socio-political problems of the time (such as social apathy, cynicism and the like—"Romeo" is seen as a typical representative of the ruling class). The critic also somewhat coyly dismissed the "erotic questions" raised by Turgenev's novella: "A reader of today has no time for these [unimportant issues]; he is too busy with problems of administrative and judicial improvements, financial reforms, and emancipation of the surfs" (*Избранные статьи* 195, 207).

This reviewer of *Assya* was to become a cult author who would be adored and diligently studied by Vladimir Lenin, along with many generations of radical revolutionaries in Russia and, later on, young komsomol members and communists in the Soviet Union. Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828–1889) was a major Russian utopianist, a younger coeval of Turgenev but clearly a very different thinker and author. Still, just like Gogol, Turgenev or Tolstoy, he makes his views of the problems of family, gender and sexuality central to his most significant literary endeavors—the two novels *Что делать? / What is to Be Done?* (1863) and *Prologue* (1871).

As far as gender equality or the emancipation of women are concerned, Chernyshevsky's first novel did contain important new insights. For example, Lopukhov (a "panegyrist of women," as Polozova calls him), disguised as the American businessman Beaumont, is amazed that women are capable of making "right choices" of marital partners and creating "happy families":

> If with such scanty means of judging the necessities and characters of men, girls very often succeed in making satisfactory choices, what a brightness and soundness of wit it shows that women possess! What a true, strong, vigilant mind nature has gifted them withal! And this mind remains without advantage for society, society dismisses it, oppresses it, chokes it, and the history of mankind would have advanced tenfold quicker if this intellect had not been dismissed, oppressed, and killed. (*What is to Be Done?* 441)

At the same time, there seems to be no place for love, affection and sexual attraction in Chernyshevsky's utopia. In his critique of human pair-bonds, Chernyshevsky anticipates the arguments of Russian religious philosophers around the turn of the century (Solovyov, Fyodorov, Berdyaev), albeit ones originating from different ideological positions. Rakhmetov, a cultish role model for many generations of revolutionaries to come,

famously reproaches Vera Pavlovna for feeling aggrieved that her ex-husband Lopukhov might have been jealous when she fell in love with his best friend Kirsanov:

> In an intelligent person [jealousy (*ревность*)] has no right to exist. It is a mutilated feeling, it is a false feeling, a contemptible feeling; it is the result of that order of things, according to which I don't allow anybody to wear my underclothes, smoke my meerschaum; this is the result of viewing a person as personal property, as a chattel.

Rakhmetov goes on to disagree with Vera that, in denying jealousy, he is arguing for an "absolute immorality":

> How often do you dine every day? Once? Would anyone be offended if you dined twice? Of course not. Then why don't you do so? Is it because you are afraid of offending someone? In all probability, it is simply because you don't need it . . . [your] stomach says that one dinner is agreeable and the second may be disagreeable.

It follows quite logically for Rakhmetov that there is no "moral advantage in jealousy" as most people are not "restrained by this nonsense, but are simply driven to be cunning, deceitful." The solution to all of Vera's problems he suggests is quite straightforward—a *ménage à trois*—that will help avoid an "entirely unnecessary melodrama" and "vain suffering":

> Meantime, you all three might have lived together very calmly . . . you might have arranged to move into one apartment . . . to drink tea all three together, and as before, to go to the opera all three together. (*What is to Be Done?* 306–309)

Clearly, there are no plans for sexual intercourse in Rakhmetov's vision of what Russians call a "Swedish family" (the ascetic can only think of them drinking tea together or going to the opera). He sees sexual relations between man and woman as something trivial (indeed, he repeatedly asserts that Vera is suffering from "trifles"), a contemptible "melodramatic" aspect of human lives that can be easily dispensed with and replaced with a purely spiritual union of the three kin souls, Chernyshevsky's "new men."

The author's second novel presents us with a different case. While *What is to Be Done?* was conceived of as a response to Turgenev's *Fathers and Children, Prologue* can be seen, in part, as a critique of the above-quoted novella *Assya* and the whole concept of "Turgenev maidens" (Chernyshevsky may have seen Turgenev as his ideological and literary rival). Meri (a.k.a. Maria Dmitrievna), the main heroine of the novel's second

part (narrated by Levitsky, a character based on Nikolai Dobrolyubov), can be seen as a blending of Assya and her serf mother Tatiana: she is a house-maid who becomes a wealthy landowner's wife thanks to her good looks, cool reasoning and, last but not least, iconoclastic views on marriage and sexuality in general. In addition, Meri appears to be quite open to pleasurable sexuality:

> I don't know how [Meri's] life would unfold—would it be worse or better—were it possible to protect it from free and pure pleasure (*от свободного и чистого наслаждения*). True, for a young woman there are a lot of grieves attached to it that a young man does not experience: he is not insulted for earnestly—or even not quite earnestly—seeking pleasure (*наслаждения*), whereas a girl is shamelessly reproached even for the most impeccable attraction (*самое безукоризненное увлечение*): how dares she to have human feelings before she is renamed into a married woman? But I am still not sure which is easier and better for a young woman, to endure reproaches for succumbing to irresistible attractions of the heart and body (*за повиновение непреодолимому влечению сердца и тела*) or strive to suppress them by ascetic, semi-ascetic and not at all ascetic means that all are equally impotent to suppress [these attractions] and all are hazardous to one's health (*вредны для здоровья*). (*Пролог* 409–410)

Ever since she was a very young girl, Meri had picked only rich lovers, but she admits that she used to be unable to live without experiencing sexual attraction and falling in love. However, as she grows up, by the age of twenty, she has become capable of separating the two feelings, i.e., she realizes that she can have sex with her lovers (and make use of their wealth) *without* being in love with them (that is, without losing her head) and thus have them under control (*Пролог* 436–37).

This character's relative openness to sex, along with several erotic scenes in the novel,[29] might have been rather unique for the highbrow Russian literature of the nineteenth century after Pushkin. Unfortunately, many readers of Chernyshevsky did not take the erotic and sexual motifs of his two novels seriously, as those were supposed to be merely window-dressing for some serious revolutionary socio-economic ideas that both texts undoubtedly contained. The radical writer (who was on several occasions arrested, jailed or exiled by the government) needed to fool his censors. Ironically, even Nabokov, who had the protagonist of *The Gift*

[29] Most notably, Levitsky's erotic experience of rescuing the young woman Anyuta from her enraged drunken husband and feeling attracted to her semi-naked battered (but luscious) body (*Пролог* 261–63).

(1938), Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, study Chernyshevsky and write the largely satirical biography *The Life of Chernyshevsky* (Chapter 4 of the novel), seems to have failed to notice the writer's interesting pronouncements about emancipation, gender equality and sexuality. Nabokov's protagonist is probably right when he ridicules Volgina, the main character of the first part of the novel, a frivolous, fun-loving woman who had her prototype in Chernyshevsky's wife Olga Sokratovna:

> In *Prologue* (and, in part, in *What is to Be Done*?) we are moved by the author's attempt to exonerate his wife. There are no lovers, there are only reverential admirers; there is no cheap playfulness that made "little men" (as she, alas, would express herself) take her for a woman even more accessible than she actually was; there is only the *joie de vivre* of a sharp-witted beauty. *Light-mindedness is thus transformed into freethinking* (*Легкомыслие превращено в свободомыслие*). (*Дар* 264–65, italics added)

However, the novel that Cherdyntsev derogatorily dubs the "trash of feeble imagination" (*Дар* 260) consists of two parts: as hinted above, Levitsky's diary does in fact incorporate fictional discourses of sexual freethinking (or *libertinage*, as in the title of this book), male and especially female.[30] *Prologue*'s second part is not as fleshless and asexual as many works by its author's coevals, and one can only regret that these "opening remarks" (that is, a "prologue") may have remained unappreciated by such diverse readers of Chernyshevsky as Tolstoy, Lenin or Nabokov.

Anton Chekhov: The Anxieties of a Modernizing Twist

Anton Chekhov is perhaps the most controversial figure in this cultural landscape of writers whose inability to modernize representations of the sexual may have had to do with their lack of knowledge of natural sciences and medicine rather than as a class marker (as was the case with Tolstoy's denial of leucocytes mentioned above). On one level, his work seems to be such a leap forward or even a breakthrough: a physician by training, he was not afraid of depicting corporeality and "bodily needs." Critics feel that he was ostensibly totally immune from the influences of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and thus explain why he always lashed out

[30] Nabokov's Cherdyntsev indirectly admits that *Prologue* does contain erotic scenes but dismisses their alleged "morbidly detailed eroticism" (*Дар* 319). In the next chapters I will refer to Nabokov's uneasiness with Joyce's and Georgii Ivanov's texts for similar reasons.

against his fellow Russian authors—predecessors or coevals—for their pretentious pontifications and inability to express the practical concerns of everyday existence. At the same time, the treatment of sexuality in some of his short stories and plays reveals his own deep uneasiness about representing male and female sexuality and eroticism—his awareness of what still needed to be represented.

Concerned with his Russian patient Sergei Pankeyev (who was preoccupied with Russian literature, especially with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky), Sigmund Freud once noted that "even those Russians who are not neurotics are quite ambivalent—just like the characters of Dostoevsky's novels" (*Содом и Психея* 315).

A neurotic or not, Grigorii Vasiliev, the protagonist of "An Attack of Nerves" / « Припадок » (1888), can stand to make my point.[31] He is definitely quite "ambivalent" and akin to many characters from Dostoevsky. The obvious parallel with *Notes from the Underground* has been explored by critics (e.g., Flath), but being a law student and a hypochondriac (at one point, Chekhov highlights his *мнительность* / *hypochondria* / *mistrustfulness*—one of the key Dostoevsky words, very hard to translate), Vasiliev is also comparable to Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov. He may well be a parody of both. This is also a story about prostitution, but in this regard, again, Chekhov's portrayal of Moscow sex workers, as I try to show below, may be a parody of Dostoevsky's soulful, sentimental prostitutes—such as Sonya Marmeladova.

Indeed, at the beginning of the story, Vasiliev, the narrator informs us, knows about prostitutes "from books and by hearsay": he has never been to a brothel and never met a prostitute in real life. He is reluctant to go but his two friends, a student of art and a student of medicine, are able to persuade him. However, he has fantasized a lot about his first encounter with a fallen woman:

> Vasiliev's imagination was drawing a picture of him and his buddies knocking at the door, then *creeping along dark corridors and through dark rooms toward women* (*будут красться к женщинам*); finally . . . he will strike a match and suddenly light up . . . *a face full of suffering and a guilty smile* (*страдальческое лицо и виноватую улыбку*). The mysterious blonde or brunette will probably be with loose hair and in a white night gown; *she*

[31] The best critical takes on this story include Marena Senderovich's article "The Symbolic Structure of Chekhov's Story 'An Attack of Nerves'" and the much more recent (2000) essay by Carol Flath "Chekhov's Underground Man: 'An Attack of Nerves.'" A helpful and up-to-date source on Chekhov's poetics in general is Donald Rayfield's 1999 monograph *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study of Chekhov's Prose and Drama.*

> *will be startled by the light*, get extremely embarrassed and say: "For the love of God, what are you doing! Put it out!" This is all *terrifying but new and fascinating*. (*Сочинения* 202. Italics added)

This mockingly romanticized, sentimentalized vision of a prostitute is arguably a sparkling parody of Dostoevsky's ideas, about which Chekhov must have been skeptical.

The reality Vasiliev and his friends encounter differs drastically from his literature-induced, masturbatory fantasies: the girls and the atmosphere they see in each brothel they visit are very depressing and totally devoid of any air of romance (to be sure, nothing "new and fascinating"). Unlike Raskolnikov however, Vasiliev is rather cynical about what he sees:

> How unskillfully they are selling themselves! [He mused] *Can't they understand that vice is only charming when it is beautiful and in hiding, when it has the appearance of a virtue* (*порок только тогда обаятелен, когда он красив и прячется, когда он носит оболочку добродетели*)? *Modest black dresses, pale faces, sad smiles and darkness work better than all this tacky tinsel*. How stupid they are! If they don't get it themselves, maybe clients could teach them or something… (*Сочинения* 206. Italics added)

In other words, Vasiliev's "love for his neighbor" somehow doesn't affect his sexual behavior: he thinks that if he is attracted to pale faces and modest dresses ("charming vice"), then everyone else is expected to like those, as well. Chekhov is definitely ironic about (or simply would not agree with) what Weber and Freud saw as the epitome of Russianness (love for one's neighbor): Vasiliev seems ultimately very far from caring about people who surround him, and he is able to track his personal desires apart from moral norms.

Vasiliev's plan of saving "fallen women" worldwide can straightforwardly be characterized as a travesty. He successively discards various ways of improving their lot: offering them alternative employment, having devoted ascetics like himself marrying the girls (he feels he is too squeamish to marry an ex-prostitute in the first place), and, finally, implementing the "apostolate": standing at a seedy district house corner and explaining to cabmen and passers-by the evils of this "modern slavery." Characteristically, Vasiliev sees this situation in social terms, representing prostitutes as subhuman with no agency of their own; he repeatedly refers to them as "dumb animals," repulsive creatures, etc.[32] As usual in Chekhov, the narrator thus vents his own misogyny. The following observation of

[32] This sexist worldview of the protagonist creates additional ambiguity around why Vasiliev actually breaks down after his encounter with the life of the brothels.

the narrator is a conspicuous pastiche of Dostoevsky's ideas about ascetic suffering (that Freud and Weber appear to have picked up):

> A friend of his once called Vasiliev a "talented man." There exist different talents—literary, acting, artistic—but he has a special one—humane (*человеческий*). He has a refined, splendid scent for pain in general . . . He can reflect another person's pain in his soul. Seeing tears, he cries; at a sick man's bed he becomes sick himself and moans; once he sees violence, it seems to him that violence is done to himself; he gets frightened like a little boy but being afraid, he still runs to give help. Other person's pain irritates him, excites him, leads to the condition of ecstasy and so forth. (*Сочинения* 216–217)

Through this "ecstasy and so forth," the narrator may have let out a secret: the story may not be only about prostitution after all. At another level, it is about representations of Vasiliev's own sexuality, his "love-map," as John Money would say.[33] But the overall thrust of the story does not aim to shed light upon Vasiliev's sexuality or to examine the social problem of prostitution; rather, it aims to deride, ridicule or *burlesque* the most typical Russian reaction to that social problem: embarrassment when confronting one's own and other people's sexuality. In such passages, Chekhov certainly succeeds in making fun of Dostoevsky (and maybe the utopian ideas of Tolstoy as well), but does he offer any sort of a new literary approach to the problem of prostitution?[34]

Here is where the story's finale, the visit to a psychiatrist, comes in. This is a new, modernizing twist for Russian writing: Vasiliev is suffering from a pathological condition that brings him to the verge of suicide, and it gets successfully treated or medicalized. This is almost a Hollywood-style "happy end," but Chekhov's vision is a little more ambivalent. First, there is a distinct performance component, a kind of show-off gesture, or something a bit ostentatious about Vasiliev's "attack of nerves." One

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[33] Lovemap is "a developmental representation or template in the mind and in the brain depicting the idealized lover and the idealized program of sexuoerotic activity projected in imagery or actually engaged in with that lover" (*Lovemaps* 291).

[34] Platonov, the protagonist of Aleksandr Kuprin's serialized novel about prostitution *Яма* / *The Pit* (1916), heaps lavish praise on the Chekhov story for its truthfulness and realism but also remarks that the author of "Pripadok" "could not decide to lie and to frighten people . . . He passed with his wise exact gaze over the faces of the prostitutes and impressed them on his mind. But that which he did not know he did not dare to write" (*Yama* 99). *Yama* is certainly one of the first Russian literary works, in which prostitutes are treated both realistically and with a great authorial sympathy. Chekhov's portrayal of "fallen women" in "Pripadok" seems far from being empathetic.

can feel that there is too much grotesque and pathos in the way it is represented for it to be a "true" nervous breakdown: "They are alive, alive; my goodness, they are alive!" (*Сочинения* 215) (he exclaims referring to prostitutes);[35] "Science and art are powerless here; the only solution is the apostolate" (he remarks mentally) (*Сочинения* 216). Chekhov thus recognizes the strong element of social scripting, as these "experiences" from abroad become poses within the culture.

Second, despite drawing in such representations, there is a distinct element of cynicism and *glumleniye* in the way the protagonist's intellectual and everyday life experiences are actually portrayed. Chekhov may or may not have intended it this way but Vasiliev is not simply a travesty of Dostoevsky's over-sensitive hypochondriacs. He thus arguably becomes a parody of what his author saw as Russian masculinity's general "weakness," a light graft of Western experience onto an essentially Russian situation, expressed in traditional terms: submission to female sexuality brought about by Dostoevsky-style idle philosophizing and masturbatory fantasizing about sentimental prostitutes who turn into some kind of ideal women. In other words, despite the modernist appeal of his stance on human sexualities, Chekhov's concept of carnality and eroticism lies largely in the same discursive paradigm as those of his predecessors—Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky. He sees their characters as trapped in the space between traditional norms and some more modern impulses. The story discussed here is thus still very much constructed around the strategies of silence and burlesque. Chekhov justly ridicules seeing sexual intercourse as a pathology, but is unable—or unwilling—to cease considering it a human (predominantly male) weakness and a triviality.[36]

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[35] Vasiliev's "epiphany" may be interpreted as Chekhov's ultimate departure from sexism and misogyny as the protagonist is able to see that these women are in fact alive. But in Chekhov's world of ubiquitous irony, grotesque and Gogolian *glumleniye* Vasiliev's hysterics sound very theatrical, not quite like a genuine epiphany.

[36] Interestingly, as Laura Engelstein points out citing multiple Russian sources of the 1900s and 1910s, Chekhov's "Pripadok" was often used by Russian "pedagogues" as a "prophylactic" to "keep the young from going astray" in their sexual lives (i.e., to abstain from sex and think of it as a pathology). Unlike the "harmful" *Sanin* by Mikhail Artsybashev or stories "In the Fog" by Leonid Andreyev or homoerotic short novel *Wings* by Mikhail Kuzmin (all discussed in the following chapter), this text was considered as "hygienic," along with such other emblematic works as Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Ivan Turgenev's *First Love* and *Rudin* (*The Keys to Happpiness* 371–372).

One can, of course, try to argue that these pedagogues misinterpreted Chekhov, but, as I tried to show in this section, the author does in fact trivialize and pathologize sexuality in the story.

If one finds too much ambiguity in Chekhov's representation of sex in his texts (we should not forget that they were all subjected to censorship and self-censorship), his biography offers another view into this discourse, revealed through correspondence, diaries and memoirs of his coevals. I will again not use such biographical materials to claim that the author uses life experiences to shape them into fiction through a particular interpretative lens. That would be a fundamentally flawed approach to the legacies of such literary artists as Chekhov or Tolstoy. However, it is also true that the lives of these authors could be treated—in a figurative sense—as their additional works of fiction, indispensable parts of their oeuvres—or at least a source of representations that they were interested in exploring, if not in truth. This holds specifically true for interviews or personal correspondence, which generically map an intermediate territory between an author's professional career and personal life on the one side and his literary endeavors on the other.

Donald Rayfield's biography of Chekhov is very informative in this regard because it discusses his sex life—his own exposure to and willingness to discuss sexual experience. Rayfield's numerous observations are very perceptive: "Anton, like [Aleksei] Suvorin, appreciated female sexuality but unlike Suvorin, feared sex as an addiction which, were he to surrender to it, would annul his freedom and stifle his creativity" (*Anton Chekhov: A Life* 249–50). Rayfield is on target again when he brilliantly, albeit only in passing, compares Chekhov to Gogol's Podkolyosin: "Marriage was to preoccupy Chekhov for fifteen years before he took the plunge. His behavior reminds one of . . . Podkolesin . . . who, when finally confronted with the betrothal he seeks, jumps out of the window" (*Anton Chekhov: A Life* 123). Such analogies point to the typologies of representations involved.

Rayfield may be right about Chekhov's affinity to Podkolyosin, but he does not notice the more important affinity between Gogol's and Chekhov's demonization of femininity and sexuality—or, rather, their shared irony about the prevailing norms of discourse on these topics, and what they do to individuals. He mentions briefly—whereas Galkovsky dwells on at length—the 23-year-old writer's outrageous proposal of a brochure on the "history of sexual authority" in a letter to his brother, in which women would be portrayed as incapable of evolving as quickly as men do and being in principle unable to produce any quality scientific or creative work (Galkovsky 528–529). Being a physician (gynecologist by specialization), he always managed to endow his misogyny and sexophobia with medical/biological jargon and terminology (as seen in the below

examples), yet that doesn't mean that he considers his own science as a world of discourse available more publicly. Rayfield also quotes another revealing passage from a letter in which Chekhov, at twenty-five, laments his brother Kolia's "addiction to sex":

> It's not a matter of intervention but *la femme*. Woman! The sexual instinct is a worse obstacle to work than vodka . . . A WEAK MAN goes to a woman, tumbles into her duvet and lies with her until they get colic in the groins . . . Kolia's woman is a fat piece of meat who loves to drink and eat. Before coitus she always drinks and eats, and it's hard for her lover to hold back and not drink and eat pickles (it's always pickles!) The Agathopod [Aleksandr, another elder sibling—A.L.] is also twisted round a woman's little finger. What these women will let go, the devil knows. (*Anton Chekhov: A Life* 120; emphasis added)

Unlike Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, Chekhov might have felt no guilt or shame about having sex per se—these women still seem ultimately like prostitutes, fallen women. Still, as most educated men of his time, he was adamantly critical of solitary sex or onanism and since his early teens had frequented brothels. And, in addition, he has a larger range of expression at his disposal, while still remaining fairly tightly within the class-bound scripts of his predecessors.

For instance, in one of his slightly pornographic letters to his confidant Suvorin, he lavishly described his intercourse with a Japanese prostitute in a Far Eastern brothel (*Anton Chekhov: A Life* 228). Chekhov often sought all sorts of quick, commitment-free sexual escapades with easygoing women of mainly the bohemian world of Moscow. Later in his life, his suspiciousness of intimacy, affection, and attachment was obviously aggravated by his incurable disease, TB, and the realization of impending death. After he had married the actress Olga Knipper, his letters to her often vented his evident misogyny, anti-Semitism and obsession with infantile sexual imagery, as he purported to be loving and caring. The letters are known to have produced the opposite effect, however: Knipper was actually insulted by them and called Anton "hard-hearted" (Galkovsky 489–91).

And yet Chekhov should be given credit for representing brilliantly another psycho-social dimension of the relation of the Russian intelligentsia's aversion to representations of corporeality and to what Karlinsky calls "carnal love." He also shrewdly discloses the Russian intellectuals' proclivity to distrust medical science and doctors—their unwillingness to consider new types of psycho-sexual identities. At twenty-nine, for example, he writes to Suvorin:

> The best modern writers, whom I love, serve evil, since they destroy. Some of them, like Tolstoy, say, 'Don't have sex with women, because they have mucous discharges; woman is revolting because her breath smells.' These writers . . . help the devil multiply the slugs and woodlice we call intellectuals. Jaded, apathetic, idly philosophizing, a cold intelligentsia, which . . . is unpatriotic, miserable, colorless, which gets drunk on one glass and visits 50-kopeck brothels . . .
>
> A society that doesn't believe in God but is afraid of omens and the devil, which denies all doctors and then hypocritically mourns Botkin and bows down to [Professor of Medicine] Zakharin, should not dare a hint that it knows what justice is. (*Anton Chekhov: A Life* 213–4)

In other words, being a man of his time and place (late nineteenth century Russia), Chekhov still tended to dehumanize and pathologize the very *desire* for pleasurable sex, following the discourse space of an ordinary Russian intellectual and his class-sensitive public, rather than finding new inspiration in his science. Throughout his life he represented himself as afraid of potential marriage or any long-term relationship with women, not so much because he feared it would undermine his creativity but because he would have to be bored being with the same partner every day. It is not surprising that the word "boredom," *ennui*, is perhaps one of the most frequent terms one encounters in Chekhov's correspondence: sexual stability entailed sexual boredom for this restless person. Was this representation aimed at signaling some sort of a paraphilia or disorder? There is perhaps no clear answer, but it is obvious that, with Chekhov, representations of sexuality in Russian literature did take a gigantic step forward, even as he himself remained less willing to embrace the social, psychological and political implications of that modernization.

Critics can end up misassessing the reality of such representations. Unlike Rayfield, Galkovsky tries to interpret biographical details from Chekhov's non-fiction and correspondence with friends and family not just in their relation to whatever story or play Chekhov happened to be working on at the time but, rather, in the context of Russia's intellectual history of the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is much more important for my present argument that this author's perceptions of sexuality and gender are characteristic of a general Russian tradition of representing specific class-bound interests and perceptions (while at the same time challenging them in some ways). Galkovsky proposes that Chekhov is a quintessential, epitomic, "distilled" Russian, an incarnation of the most typical Russian values and mental attitudes who "should be kept in the racial Board of Weights and Measures" (Galkovsky 96). I would highlight rather the fact that he could expand available representations of sexuality while himself remaining within the norms expected for his class.

Sexuality in the Board of Weights and Measures: Lenin and Sexuality

This discussion of the social and intellectual discourses available to represent sexuality and corporeality in Russia would not be complete without taking up the case from an intellectual not necessarily known as a fiction writer. There is a famous witticism that all classical Russian literature culminated in Vladimir Lenin (and Galkovsky is one of those who seem to take this entirely seriously). From the perspective of the present discussion, it is tempting to touch upon this "leader of the world proletariat," given the value of his public presence as a way to plumb then-current discourses.

And Lenin does not disappoint us in being typical for a nascent member of the political intelligentsia, transacting a personal position that lay beyond what was expressible for his class. A diligent A-student in secondary and high school, Lenin developed a style of writing replete with allusions to literary characters and individual works by Chekhov, Gogol or Turgenev but also teeming with all kinds of sexual and quasi-sexual imagery, mostly of a pathological character. More than that, he created a new style of philosophizing that consisted of citing an almost meaningless assortment of quotations from fellow philosophers (about 50% of his average text) and all kinds of obscene, filthy insults of these very fellow philosophers and more general salacities (the other 50% of the text). In his "philosophical" works (such as *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*), for instance, Lenin never enters into a philosophical polemic with his opponents. Rather, he simply calls them names and treats them as if they were all street boys from some gang competing for influence in a particular neighborhood, or his fellow clowns in some vagrant circus (it is well known that he was almost a compulsive lover of circus performances).

After all the demythologizing work Dmitrii Galkovsky has done with Lenin's texts, Lenin's works could be considered as pure fictions (or, to use a more contemporary term, "non-fictional prose" or even perhaps a political fiction) produced in the tradition of nineteenth-century Russian literature. Unfortunately, though, Lenin was an extremely bad stylist who, as a politician, occupied himself primarily in slapdash political journalism. However, despite the intellectual and genre limitations of this writer, one can argue that with Lenin the trademark Russian discourse traditions, representing sex in a somewhat bashful manner (epitomized by Gogol's Podkolyosin) has finally reached its apogee and burst into a prurient and garrulous political writing symptomatic of a deep problem with Russian intellectual culture at large. That is, Lenin actually turns the class-bound

and limited discourses about sexuality that I have been tracing in Russian literary traditions into a full political agenda.

To present a thumbnail of Lenin's representations of human sexuality as strategic political gestures, let me turn to two exchanges between Lenin and his communist colleagues quoted by Wendy Goldman in her fascinating book on the family policy of the Bolsheviks. The first one is his response to a challenge from Aleksandra Kollontai, a prominent female leader of the revolution:

> Kollontai contended that morality, like the family, was historically constructed and therefore subject to change. "In nature there is neither morality nor immorality," she wrote. "The satisfaction of healthy and natural instinct only ceases to be normal when it transcends the limits established by hygiene." She explained, "The sexual act should be recognized as neither shameful nor sinful, but natural and legal, as much as a manifestation of a healthy organism as the quenching of hunger or thirst." Lenin took a more conservative position, displaying HIS HIDEBOUND VICTORIAN PREJUDICES IN THE VERY METAPHOR OF HIS REPLY: "To be sure," he wrote, "thirst has to be quenched. BUT WOULD A NORMAL PERSON LIE DOWN IN THE GUTTER AND DRINK FROM A PUDDLE?" (*Women, the State, and Revolution* 7; emphasis added)

The second quote even more vividly reveals Lenin's programmatic representations of aversion to sexuality as a desirable social norm. According to Goldman, the Soviet leader was "concerned about the consequences of free sexuality in a precontraceptive society," and thus instructed Clara Zetkin:

> I MISTRUST THOSE WHO ARE ALWAYS ABSORBED IN THE SEX PROBLEM . . . the way the Indian saint is absorbed in the contemplation of his navel . . . IT TAKES TWO PEOPLE TO MAKE LOVE BUT A THIRD PERSON, A NEW LIFE, IS LIKELY TO COME INTO BEING. This deed has a social complexion and constitutes a duty to the community. (*Women, the State, and Revolution* 8; emphasis added)

One might try to disagree with Goldman's take on Lenin here. It is much more likely that the revolutionary leader was concerned with and suspicious of the consequences of any couple having sex or anyone willing to think of it beyond the stereotypes of traditional gender roles. Yet it is striking to note how strongly he still stays in the Russian traditions represented in literature, where sexuality can be represented either as shameful or as something for peasants to indulge themselves in. In trying to overcome the position of the peasantry in politics, Lenin has recourse to a limited set of representations, and so ends up looking as utopian as the upper-class positions traced to this point.

Despite a huge gap between these two very different figures, Chekhov and Lenin, at one level they could actually be brought together as representing a kind of "common denominator" in the discourses I have been tracing here. In their awareness of what the future had to bring, but their own miredness in past discourses, both served as crucial *transitional authors* in the Russian project of modernizing discourses of carnality and sexualities. In any number of literary histories, Chekhov appears as the last "classic" Russian writer of the nineteenth century, one whose work is a bridge between the legacies of such titans as Gogol and Tolstoy on the one hand and the Silver Age authors and thinkers on the other (as will be shown in *Chapter 4* on the example of Kuprin's *The Pit*). In Lenin, a parallel case needs to be made, in my estimation: the socio-political discourse of Russian utopianism found its apogee in his work. In attempting to modernize Russia in a non-European way, Lenin helped create not only a monstrous *political dystopia* (the Soviet state) but also a *discursive* one through all the multiple volumes of texts written by this prolific author—discourses that reified in new ways the old prejudices against carnality as they accepted the three-dot lacunae in images of humanity.

Representations of the sexual, the corporeal and the erotic, once again, serve as *litmus tests* in defining the viability of both the socio-political constructs and textual, ideological ones. Evgenii Zamyatin's and George Orwell's anti-utopias, *We* and *1984* respectively, of the 1920s and 40s were on target in highlighting any totalitarian rule's inevitable fiasco in subduing/controlling/regulating human sexual desire. But Russian writing of the nineteenth century was not all that homogeneous in how a comparatively limited set of discourses favored ideological foundations for subsequent utopian socio-cultural experiments.

One additional literary figure, usually somewhat at the margins of canonical literature, may have actually contributed to filling the spaces of the three dots with a greater range of discourses and representations about corporeality, eroticism, and carnality than we have seen.

Nikolai Leskov as a Deviation from the Traditions

Nikolai Leskov (1831–1895) offers a prose that represents the epitome of a less obsessively grotesque and more balanced treatment of sexual themes within the class-bound markers for Russian nineteenth-century discourses on sexuality. This author would have been long forgotten in the West and, perhaps, even in Russia, overshadowed by his prominent contemporaries,

the great "humanists" Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, had it not been for Dmitrii Shostakovich who penned the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1938), based on Leskov's eponymous novella, and for Walter Benjamin who made him central to his classic essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" (1936).[37]

Two interrelated aspects of Leskov's work emerge in these discussions to make him a "black sheep" in Russian literature of the nineteenth century and an interesting counterexample outside of the literary tradition traced here, because of: (1) his naturalistic obsession with portraying corporeality and representing all sorts of "bodily needs" and (2) his reevaluations of Russia's traditional gender roles and even gender identities, including his attempts to see the woman as not a passive object of male sexual desire, but as an active subject with a voice and an agenda of her own. Precisely these points, however, bring his innovations in representation into sharper focus as a political alternative not taken up within Russian culture.

This is not to say that Leskov was not a man of his time. It is ludicrous to comment on a nineteenth-century Russian writer using contemporary terminology of feminism and gender studies, and it is not my intention to idealize or refute this author in this way, as a kind of gender feminist *avant la lettre*. For instance, he remained as suspicious of medicine and doctors as any writer of his time: Rayfield reminds us that Chekhov, his friend, was very annoyed that in his will Leskov "demanded an autopsy to prove his doctors wrong" (*Anton Chekhov: A Life* 349).

However, Chekhov understood very well Leskov's importance and mourned him deeply while at the same time venting his own anti-Semitism:

> Writers like Leskov . . . cannot please our critics because our critics are almost all Jews who do not know the core of Russian life and are alien to it, its spirits, its forms, its humor, which is totally unclear to them, and who see the Russian man as nothing more or less than a dull foreigner. (Galkovsky 580, *Anton Chekhov: A Life* 349)

[37] Leskov's life and legacy are discussed in detail by Hugh McLean in his *Nikolai Leskov: The Man and His Art* (1977), but unfortunately the author does not touch upon the representations of sexuality, gender or corporeality in Leskov's oeuvre.

Such a passage again does double work, documenting the limits of the representations available for public use by writers like Chekhov, as well as locating him squarely within a set of class-bound prejudices. In any event, a reader's attention today will still be arrested by Leskov's sensitivity to gender issues, precisely at the moments which his older and younger contemporaries—Dostoevsky, Tolstoy or even, at times, Chekhov—would sarcastically ridicule the very idea of woman's equality to man on all occasions. The politics of these positions, however, seem to have remained outside the Russian mainstream of readers, even when its writers acknowledged them as important.

Some of Leskov's stories and essays are highly humorous and written with a light touch (such as the famous novella *Левша / Lefty*, which is sometimes referred to by its subtitle *The Steel Flea*), yet they are almost totally devoid of the trademark rampant cynicism and *glumleniye*, which I have been asserting as characteristic of so much of classical Russian literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. In other words, this author managed to master the "in-between" territory in a way that perhaps struck a new balance and charted a new course for class identities and the representations marking them in public: he neither fearfully keeps silent about sexual issues nor does he cynically burlesque them. I will begin with Leskov's obvious attempts to create his own concept of sexuality and gender (in opposition to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky) and then move to a brief discussion of one other story that confirms his agenda and worldview regarding sex issues.

In this, I wish again to call attention to writers' roles as public intellectuals, and for the politics of representation in which they engaged. Quite simply, writers were socio-political forces in the era. At the end of his life, for instance, when Tolstoy's visibility and popularity endowed him with a godlike cultural status in Russia, he became a self-styled marriage and sex counselor with a kind of power in his society: no insignificant numbers of desperate women wrote him letters seeking advice regarding their marital problems, revealing aspects of Russia's social system. The pictures they give their favorite author are shocking.

One woman complained that her father had raped her years ago and had been cohabiting with her ever since (their child was sent away to an asylum). The cool and upbeat Tolstoy ends by speaking from a very traditional perspective, replying that she should "give up her accusations and forgive [her father]" and then continuing, "From the bottom of my heart I condole with you and wish you consolation that could be found only

in the Christian teaching of love" (Engelstein "Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*," web source).[38] Another woman writes about her husband openly sleeping with her sister who happens to live in the same house with them. Tolstoy responds to her that she should "preserve her kind attitude to her husband, try to talk to him, and—this is the main thing—terminate sexual relations with him." In other words, in his social activity, the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata* seems to have retained his possible identification with older norms, as he remains a consistent proponent of Pozdnyshev's doctrine.

When *The Kreutzer Sonata* was published in 1890—and even earlier, since it had enjoyed a cultish renown at least a year before its release, it stirred a lively discussion in Russian society. Even Tolstoy's wife Sofia Andreyevna, who was lobbying the Tsar to get the green light for its publication, acknowledged its political implications as she found it too radical.[39]

Leskov's position as a writer and public intellectual lies in this tradition. Publicly, he was considered to be a follower and in every respect a supporter of Tolstoy, one who would have appreciated the kind of social innovations that would have alleviated these women's misery. However, his reactions to the supposedly new ideologies of "passive resistance to evil" and anti-sexual extremism that Tolstoy's answers revealed were rather ironic and at times incisively critical. He was against Tolstoy's take on both the procreative role of marriage and sex for pleasure. His biographer recalls: "[How can one] destroy marriage, passionate and sinful love? This seemed to [Leskov] to be an attack on life itself." Some contemporaries noted that Leskov's love of Tolstoy was "elemental and irrational," i.e., he admired him despite differing drastically from him, ideologically and ethically (Tunimanov 184, 199). Here is the root of a debate in public discourse that would come to bear fruit in a new kind of public diction.

In «По поводу *Крейцеровой сонаты*» / "Apropos *The Kreutzer Sonata*," Leskov masterfully juxtaposes his own manner of "counseling" (understood literally in this case—not quite in Benjamin's sense) with

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[38] Engelstein's book chapter entitled "Eros and Revolution" also contains an interesting discussion of the debate around Tolstoy's novella, but she doesn't mention Leskov at all (*The Keys to Happiness* 218–221).

[39] Incidentally, Sofia despised Leskov and on every occasion tried to persuade her husband that he was a really bad writer. It is ironic that she had to read to her husband aloud such Leskov stories as "A Winter Day" (1894), which openly questions Tolstoy's ideas of passive resistance, as well as his sexual ideology (Tunimanov 184).

that of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. His political tool is again a set of representations—a fiction with distinct political implications. An upper-class young woman whose face is hidden behind a veil comes in to see the narrator (again, as in the case of Pozdnyshev, fully identifiable as an individual in a class position like the author's own, and perhaps an ideal representation of him) in his Petersburg apartment on the day of Dostoevsky's funeral (which they both attended earlier that day). She seeks his advice on a very delicate matter: she has been unfaithful to her husband for years and now is confronted by a dilemma: whether to conceal it from him or reveal herself and ask his forgiveness. She tells the narrator that she is familiar with his works and values his "practicality," which instills trust in him (the reader is thus immediately reminded of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky's lofty theorizing that has little or no relevance to everyday life). The woman is noticeably tortured by remorse; however, although she respects her husband as an honest and decent man, she finds him stale and doesn't love him at all.

Taking a very un-Tolstoy-esque position, Leskov the narrator suggests that she spare her husband's deep frustration and keep this affair a secret, until she can terminate her infatuation with the other man, whom she does not "love" but rather "pities." A very distinct class awareness now is represented in the story. The woman explains that Russian peasant women never use the verb "love" (*любить*) in the sexual sense: rather, they use the verb *pity* (*жалеть*). Leskov implies that this verb is very close in spelling to the verb *desire* (*желать*). A major argument crosses the narrator's mind: if men feel free to lie to their wives and commit adulteries without their wives ever learning about it, why should not women be entitled to a similar tactic? He has begun to redraw Russian stereotypes in indigenous terms, not with reference to foreign discourses of eroticism.

The guest tells the narrator that she has visited Dostoevsky twice, obviously seeking his advice on the same matter. Once he was rude to her; on the other occasion, polite and kind. One of the most hilarious moments in the first part of the story comes when the woman exclaims: "My soul would be purified through suffering!" (if she confesses her sin to her husband). The narrator mentally remarks: "It seemed to me I could see her soul: it was a lively, impetuous soul but *not one to be purified through suffering* (*но не из тех душ, которых очищает страдание*). Therefore I instantly changed the subject and asked her about her children . . ." (Leskov "A Propos . . ." web source; italics added). Leskov's irony toward Dostoevsky is as subtle as it is biting, and we are thus brought to the realization that the

story being set on the day of his funeral has symbolic significance. Dostoevsky's ideas suddenly appear as lifeless as their author.

It is highly entertaining to note that, in this depiction, both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky literally failed as "sex councilors" of their visitors and correspondents. Leskov deserves credit for exposing so masterfully this failure of his "great contemporaries" with just a few light strokes in single story, which seems to offend no one directly but implicitly ridicules both giants of Russian literature.

In the second part of the story the narrator accidentally encounters the woman again, three years later at a European spa. This time, M-me N. is accompanied by her "comely but alcoholic husband and extraordinarily beautiful child." The narrator underscores the woman's intelligence as they start socializing as if they had never met. Then a tragedy suddenly occurs: the nine-year old son dies of diphtheria. The child's father shows very little grief at the death of his son. A few days later the woman drowns herself in the same swamp where her child was buried.

Building on this story, one can try to draw the contours of Leskov's radical ideology of sexuality and gender. In such sympathetic depictions of women's experience, he seems much less of a sexist—or a utopian—than many of his contemporaries, and definitely not a misogynist; in these representations, he was very much at odds with the patriarchy of Russian society. In fact, the two parts of the story in question are interrelated organically to nuance its political critique: M-me N. ultimately proves to be much more devoted to her family than her husband and is eventually not "purified" through Dostoevskian suffering but redeemed via her suicide—she admits a genuine emotion and is brought to her death, rather than following a social stereotype. Even more importantly, in such a gesture, Leskov highlights the problem that is still topical in patriarchal societies: the "double standard" in evaluating female and male extramarital affairs when a male's infidelity is excused or even encouraged while an unfaithful female is always likened to a whore and publicly denounced. The two genders cannot find the same resolution within proper society.

Leskov also indirectly exposes the hypocrisy and injustice of the Tolstoy/Pozdnyshev doctrine of the sterile/continent "angelic family." M-me N. is by traditional Russian standards an adulterous woman who actually not only takes the moral upper hand over her husband and patriarchal society in general but also, perhaps more importantly, has full authorial sympathy for her fate when she loses the one person she probably does love, her son. This is undoubtedly a more sober look at the representations of social and emotional relationships between the sexes at the time, which

appears rather unique to Russia by a deep lack of sentimentality or tragic diction.

The storyteller here manages to represent a sense of gender equality and justice previously unheard of in Russian literature. Very much along the lines of Benjamin's argument in the essay entitled "The Storyteller," in which he discusses Leskov, it is up to the reader to interpret the life trajectory of M-me N., rather than the author leading them to a specific critique. Unlike his "more outstanding" colleagues, Leskov does not preach or impose anything on the readers, nor simply seek to amuse them or repulse them. While he did not contribute much to generating a literary language or discourse of sexualities, he did at least pave the way for a gender sensitivity that would emerge in the twentieth century—but certainly not earlier in his native Russia. He reinscribes the limits of class identity, clearly pointing to political innovations necessary for society—and not in the utopian political terms that even Lenin ultimately espoused.

The discussed story is not the only one in which Leskov addresses sexualities and gender in ways other than the black/white poles ossified in traditional Russian discourses on sexuality. A much earlier story, "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk" (1864), is built around a classic love triangle: the bored merchant's wife Katerina and a young steward named Sergei fall passionately in love and cold-bloodedly murder the merchant upon his return to the house from a business trip. It is Katerina who masterminds this act of violence (as well as subsequent ones); her lover is merely her accomplice.[40]

Unlike much of early Leskov, this story does not contain any "righteous man," and although the reader is expected to sympathize with the tragedy of the voluptuous Katerina, she is no righteous woman either. The story instead explores the nature of sensuality and its link to violence and death. Interestingly, the story bears the subtitle *ocherk*, which can be translated as a "sketch" or "an essay" which recalls authors such as Dostoevsky who would construct their novels around real-life criminal cases and whose fiction often incorporates scholarly essays on ethical issues written by protagonists (for example, Raskolnikov or Ivan Karamazov). But unlike most of Dostoevsky, the position and voice of the narrator are quite different in Leskov's novella: as Gilbert Adair correctly observes in a recent

[40] Representations of gender in this story, along with *Cathedral Folk* and some other works of Leskov, are discussed in some detail by Faith Wigzell in the essay "Nikolai Leskov, Gender and Russianness" (Barta 105–120).

commentary, he is *dispassionate*. It is precisely Leskov's impartial tone (he is merely "reporting" the atrocities that take place throughout the narrative) that made such a horrifying impression on readers in the 1860s, when the story earned the reputation of a shocker (*Lady Macbeth* viii–ix).

The sociopolitical dimensions of this crime are also brought to the fore, as the young couple proceeds to live together, openly contemplating their cloudless future as owners of the late Zinovii's estate and fortune. Suddenly, Zinovii's nephew, a 9-year-old child, is brought in by a relative: it turns out that he is the legal heir to most of the estate. Katerina and Sergei thus murder the child as well smothering him with a pillow. At this point, the lovers are convicted, publicly whipped and sent to the Siberia for penal servitude. Katerina's newly born child is sent to an asylum since she has no interest in it. On their way to the Siberia, Leskov dwells at length on Sergei the womanizer's treacherous infidelity to proud and loving Katerina who finally drowns herself and one of her female "rivals," Sonetka, when the convicts are transported across a river on a barge (*Lady Macbeth* 62). Here, the punishment for the crime falls well in line with patriarchal norms, while the lovers' motivations acquire distinct new overtones.

The story is horrifying in its author's naturalistic fascination with violence and murder and its Shakespearean intensity.[41] This is where Leskov exposes his readers to gender inequality in patriarchal society, which invariably would make women desperately unhappy and thus prone to destructive and self-destructive behavior, no matter how defined. Although Shostakovich's librettist turned the novella into what Adair calls ironically "the Madame Bovary of Mtsensk" (i.e., Katerina's monomaniac sexuality was downplayed while the criticism of bourgeois marriages highlighted), Joseph Stalin famously walked out of a 1936 Moscow premiere of the opera. Chandler (the story's English translator) asks rhetorically if the dictator was more appalled at the story's "blatant sexuality" or the protagonist's totalitarian/paranoid "single-mindedness" (*Lady Macbeth* xvi). I would suggest a third option: that the dictator saw in this tale a kind of individual resistance to traditional order, revealing it as almost inevitably corrupt.

Today's reader most overtly sees in Leskov a satirical reversal of traditional gender roles: voluptuous, "non-righteous" men (like Sergei in "Lady Macbeth" or M. N. in "Apropos the Kreutzer Sonata") are portrayed as weak

[41] Chandler quotes Leskov's confession to a friend that he was himself in a state of horror and "delirium" as he was writing the novella (*Lady Macbeth* xiii).

and effeminate, women as strong-willed and determined. Critics also take note of the understandable darkness and gloominess of Leskov's vision of the Russian family and relationships between the sexes on general. Just as Osip Mandelshtam once said that Acmeism was "[Russian] yearning for Western culture" (Akhmatova, web source), Leskov's work emerges in such accounts as an attempt to adapt the West's sexual ideologies and literary discourses of the middle to late nineteenth century to Russian culture without losing Russia's own unique legacy in the process—and one of the few successful ones.

Literary-historical judgments may run a little differently. With Leskov the "art of storytelling" in Russian literature indeed "came to an end," at least in terms of the traditional dichotomies I have traced here. In consequence, today one knows for sure that Benjamin was right: the closer we look at Leskov, the more we realize his loneliness in his time, which is so distant from us (Benjamin 83–87); and yet the discourses which ground his concerns about gender roles and equality of the sexes are still very topical for Russia.

One other important novella deserves note in this context as an even more radical gesture of resistance: "The Specter of Mme Genlis: A Spiritist Case" (1881). Its intertextual richness (as well as Leskov's obvious satire of spiritism fads in Russia's high society at the time) is brilliantly analyzed in a recent Alexander Zholkovsky article (« Маленький метатекстуальный шедевр Лескова »),[42] but I would like to stress a different aspect of this text that nonetheless pulls his work into line as a critique of the tradition I have been sketching, especially in terms of the several layers of irony that Leskov uses to mock the Russian reading public's conception of literature as a major educational aid in teaching abstention from the corporeal and the carnal to younger generations. This didactic function of literature is ridiculed explicitly in this story through the old Princess's fascination with an obscure French female author of the eighteenth century and her belief that exposure to Mme Genlis's texts will necessarily produce the desired

[42] For example, Zholkovsky is quite right when he emphasizes the narrator's recurring, almost obsessive focus on hands and arms in the story (*ruchki*). I would push the critic's argument a little further and suggest that this may have been Leskov's conscious parody of Gogol who was obviously known for fetishizing female hands/arms/forearms/fingers (including *Marriage* and "Nevsky prospect" discussed above)—probably, in his turn, trying to make fun of Pushkin's preoccupation with legs and feet (*nozhki*). Through this irony, Leskov may have intended to symbolically break away from Gogol's anti-eroticism and firmly position himself as a follower of Pushkin's celebration of carnal desires and bodily needs.

purifying effect, unlike most Russian writers whose works, in her judgment, contain *разжигающие предметы* / "rousing things" (*Сочинения* 304). That is, Leskov here not only acts as a social critic, he also ironically disputes the role of author as a public intellectual and authority, suggesting that literature might mislead as often as it might lead.

As Leskov topicalizes this problem in the text, the Princess's young daughter is therefore controlled literarily: she is denied any access to most Pushkin, all Gogol and Lermontov and some love scenes in Turgenev. Even Goncharov's *Oblomov* is somehow deemed too erotic as at some point the author mentions the protagonist's gazing at some woman's elbows . . . As a result, in the best traditional terms, the younger princess remains totally unaware of the sexual and the corporeal, and her ignorance frightens and puzzles her as she is finally made to read out loud a passage from Mme Genlis containing a rather scabrous anecdote about Mme Dudeffand, an old blind countess, actually touching Edward Gibbon's face (the historian was an obese man) and taking it to be his buttocks. The French writer confides to her readers that this word is too obscene to be pronounced or written down; the Russian innocent cannot conceive of such expressions. In this culminating scene of the story, the shocked young woman thus asks her mother what the blind Mme Dudeffand really thought Gibbon's face was. But the old princess is unable to relate it to her daughter, who is having a horrible attack of nerves. The reader later learns that the Princess flew into the rage and burnt all the magical volumes of her beloved author that very night. *This* is an example of a new politics of the literary, a Leskov recommendation reacting to overvaluing of literary representation as an index to social truth.

In this story of a naïve, silly girl, a creation of her own class position, Leskov has brilliantly anatomized Russian upper classes' proclivity for irrational admiration of belles-lettres, especially of the French tradition, and, by implication, of the Russian literary traditions drawing from them, which include canonical authors from Pushkin to Tolstoy. Literature is thus invested with expectations that it *a priori* is unable to fulfill, especially vis-à-vis social mores: there is no such thing as pure spirituality; the corporeal and carnal will always be present in any secular writing. On the other hand, even Russian literature is ironically presented as a threat to a young person's chastity: the humorous reference to Oblomov's attraction to female elbows demonstrates that in reality the discourses in these novels appeal very much to false assumptions about what is normal, like those of the insane old woman.

Leskov's message to his most attentive readers is therefore quite obvious: by taking fiction too seriously (as a pedagogical aid, for instance), one can end up inflicting real psychological harm and damage upon younger generations who will be baffled and disoriented when they discover that literature cannot be devoid of sex, eroticism and corporeality and one is unable to learn "pure spirituality" from it. Note that such warnings against young girls and literature were commonplaces in Western European literature at the end of the eighteenth century, not this late.

Yet at this comparatively late date, Leskov still urges Russians to *unlearn* the idea that they can get to know everything about "real life" from fiction through following the lessons "learnt" by their favorite characters. The only "moral" one actually "learns" from this story is well-expressed by the Diplomat, one of the Countess's friends who has witnessed her downfall as an admirer of Madame Genlis: "The best of snakes is still a snake; the better . . . the snake, the more dangerous it is because it keeps its poison in its tail" (*Сочинения* 312). Politics has the last word about erotics.

The Legacy of Anti-Utopianism in the Silver Age

This chapter has offered a sampling of how various canonical authors' texts conform to a tradition of sexual and erotic discourses in the Russian literature of the nineteenth century as they reified a particular public speaking position. These close readings of several passages by Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Leskov have served, I hope, to illustrate the thesis formulated in the initial chapter: throughout the history of Russian literature, from the Golden Age to the Silver Age and beyond, the creative representations of carnality, sexualities and eroticism were almost invariably transformations of real experiences into discourses stressing pathologization, silence, or burlesque, and thus marked by extremely limited resources for innovating into class consciousness. Even when canonical authors clearly point to problems that these discourse stereotypes impose on individuals—even when the politics of such representations are revealed as devastating for individuals who try to use them to chart their own courses through social experience—they rarely look to remedy such deficits by offering alternatives. They are critics whose social politics remain utopian, or simply unrealistic. Only Leskov opens closed spaces of representation to reformulate the questions that must be asked of these social roles, if not yet offering answers to them. That he has been considered less canonical than others discussed here is a clear

consequence of his choices, and evidence of how radical his questioning might have seemed.

In my next chapter, I will move into the consequences of this legacy of an oddly implicated discourse of sexuality and class position. There, I will make the case that, in fact, literary and cultural discourses did prepare for an epistemological rupture in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The critiques posed by canonical authors would have the effect of calling attention to the need for new resources to express Russian experience.

I will devote my attention to the intellectual and literary (sub)field of the Silver Age period as it evolved in dialogue with the great literary tradition of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Pushkin and Gogol. The corporeal and the erotic, largely suppressed or distorted in the nineteenth century by the available strategies for representation traced in the present chapter, seemed suddenly to come to the forefront at the turn of the century. Probably as a result of closer interactions between the lower classes (mainly through the numerous sects that collectively were much more powerful than the Orthodox Church) and educated strata of society, many suddenly became fascinated by the ideological and cultural production of the sects as a new source for indigenous discourses about sex and society.

On the one hand, these sects radicalized the longstanding ideal of overcoming or dispensing with sexual intercourse that had dominated Russian utopian thought and religious philosophy that reached their apogee in the first decades of the twentieth century. We will see that these tendencies were countered by a certain intellectual resistance coming from Vasilii Rozanov and his followers, but even so, these early Russian attempts at generating Russia's own, autochthonous modern discourse of carnality and eroticism remained largely unsuccessful and did not exert formative influence on subsequent generations of literati, both in the Bolshevik Russia and émigré circles.

Nonetheless, the thrust of literary projects of such anti-utopian authors as Pushkin and Leskov that were more open to corporeality and eroticism was to be taken over and developed in the Silver Age and émigré writing by such authors as Kuzmin, Sologub, Kuprin, G. Ivanov and Nabokov. The subsequent two chapters will thus be devoted to exploring the literary legacy of the Silver Age as it revealed itself in the birth of a new sensitivity to expressions of the carnal and the corporeal.

CHAPTER THREE

SILENCE IS GOLDEN, SPEECH IS SILVER: CORPOREALITY, SENSUALITY, AND "PORNOGRAPHY" IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE OF THE SILVER AGE

Мы любим плоть - и вкус ее, и цвет,
И душный, смертный плоти запах…
Виновны ль мы, коль хрустнет ваш скелет
В тяжелых, нежных наших лапах?

Aleksandr Blok "Scythians" (1918)[1]

The case studies of Russian literati's individual works presented in *Chapter 2* were to show the tension in representing sexualities in Russian literature, only to be later transmitted to religious philosophy. The well-respected Russian sexologist Igor Kon argues that such tensions were also present in West European and North American literatures (*Сексуальная культура* 95). *Pace* Kon, however, a more genuine erotic and corporal discourse was manifest in French, British and German fiction from this period and even much earlier.[2] For example, in the nineteenth century it was represented by Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant in France; Oscar Wilde (among others) in England; Walt Whitman in America. In Franco- and Anglophone Western countries there have always been a variety of

[1] "We cherish flesh—both its taste and color, / And suffocating, deathly smell… / Are we to blame if your skeleton crunches / In our heavy tender paws?" («Скифы», all translations from the Russian in this chapter are mine, unless marked otherwise). This heavily nationalistic poem, written shortly after the October revolution, is prefaced by an epigraph from Vladimir Solovyov, in which Blok's teacher movingly confesses that the word "Pan-Mongolism" is a wild one but a feast to his ear. The poem is obviously addressed to Europe and the West in general: it is their / its skeleton that is supposed to crunch in Russia's bear hug. For Blok, Russians do like flesh, the ways it tastes and looks, but why does this Russian flesh have to *smell* so foul? When flesh decays, it is supposed to smell just like Blok describes: it emits suffocating, deathly stench. This strophe comes in handy as an introduction to this chapter as it posits the inextricable link between corporeality and death / decay characteristic of many works of Russian literature of the Silver Age.

[2] For example, in Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* (1761) the protagonist claims that the longer one lives and the more one spends, the richer one actually becomes: "One day less to live or one crown more, it all comes to the same. *The important thing is to evacuate the bowels easily, freely, pleasantly and copiously every evening*… This is the final outcome of life in every sphere" (Diderot 52; italics added). This is an unequivocal celebration of bodily functions that one will hardly be able to find in the Russian literature and philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

sexual ideologies (beginning at least with Rabelais in France), and even the Victorians were unable to suppress "carnival culture" and erotic literature. In the first decades of the twentieth century a new artistic impulse to a frank and in-depth discussion of sex and gender (homosexuality, procreative and pleasurable sexuality, femininity and masculinity) in highbrow literature and culture was manifest in the novels of James Joyce and Marcel Proust.

As mentioned in the *Introduction*, the French-Swiss Slavist Georges Nivat calls this missing element *libertinage*: in French and in English, this word conveniently means both depravity and freethinking. He contrasts Gogol with Rabelais and shows that, prior to the Silver Age, Russian literature had never experienced treating the carnal, the erotic and the corporeal with Rabelaisian laughter. Even the translation of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* into Russian was an uphill task for Nikolai Lyubimov, recognized by Nivat as one the best translators from French in the Soviet period, who realized that, beyond the infamous *мат / foul language*, the Russian language was much less expressive and flexible than French in articulating sex and body matters and, despite all his efforts, was in many cases unable to keep faithful to the French original. Nivat claims that the Russian novel of the nineteenth century failed to produce literary "libertinage," but that it started to develop during the Silver Age period, only to be thwarted by the Soviet regime (*Возвращение в Европу*, web source).

Indeed, Russian socio-political and philosophical (free)thinking had always been divorced from sexual freethinking, from describing sexual love and eroticism, both "normal" sex and "perversions" or "pathologies." According to Nivat, Aleksandr Pushkin's long poem *Gavriiliada* (as was argued in *Chapter 1*, an imitation of Evariste de Parny) is one of the few examples of freethinking in literature while being at the same time free of "obscenities," i.e., *мат* (*Возвращение в Европу*, web source). This peculiarity of Russia's intellectual history—the virtual absence of *libertinage*—ultimately led to the emergence of a very anti-sexual, anti-corporeal and misogynistic brand of religious philosophy in the cases of Fyodorov, Solovyov and Berdyaev.

In other words, Russian literature and philosophy ("freethinking") have never managed to fill in the gap between the pompous and euphemistic pseudo-sexuality of "highbrow culture"[3] and the crude and bawdy

[3] One must agree with Nivat here: in authors like Leo Tolstoy characters are tortured by their closeted, repressed sexuality but they never reveal it as to them it is destructive

"straightforwardness" of popular wisdom and low-class / criminal jargons. Most Russian writers have chosen to adhere to the former and ignore the latter. A contemporary novelist Vladimir Sorokin aptly parodies this volatile mixture of two extremes in one of the dialogues of his mock quest novel *Сердца четырех* / *The Hearts of the Four* (1991). In this excerpt, two companions, a young male and female who are obviously not in what one would call a "relationship," are willing to relax after a long day of "work":

> [Rebrov] was silently looking at the fire, then uttered:
> "Olga Vladimirovna. Let's fuck. (*Давайте поебёмся*)"
> Olga raised her brows in surprise.
> "Um . . . Right now?"
> He nodded [. . .]
> Rebrov started to move faster, bent backwards, then seized Olga by the shoulders and roared into her hair.
> "Vitya . . ." [a diminutive form of Rebrov's first name—A.L.] she whispered and then smiled.
> "Oops, there is some saliva dripping," he rubbed his mouth with his hand, moved away and, exhausted, fell on the sofa. "Um . . . Olga Vladimirovna . . . forgive me . . . Please . . ."
> "For what?" she touched herself between the legs and smelled her hand.
> "Forgive me, forgive me for everything," Rebrov mumbled . . . (*Сердца четырех* 379–80)

Two things must be noted here: first, Sorokin repeatedly uses the punctuation device of ellipsis, or *dot-dot-dot*, which has been highlighted in *Chapter 2* as a manifestation of the discourse of silence. Second, the combination *давайте поебёмся* sounds really hilarious in Russian because it combines a polite *vy* form of address (*davaite / let us*) with the use of very vulgar, obscene slang (*poyebiomsia / fuck*). Then later, after the intercourse, Rebrov asks Olga to forgive him for everything, which sounds sentimental and comical at the same time. By mixing together these stylistic extremes, Sorokin very successfully creates a comic effect by exposing limited expressive possibilities of the Russian literary language. He also shows how easily sex can be trivialized and linked to the feelings of guilt and shame in a late Soviet cultural context.

It would be quite interesting to trace the utter inability of a rationally and emotionally satisfying erotic discourse in so many significant Russian writers of the past and present (from Gogol to Dostoevsky to Viktor Pelevin).

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and shameful. Father Sergius "censors himself" by chopping off one of his fingers (a phallic symbol) with an axe. This is a horrifying self-destructive effort to keep one's sexuality controlled or, in Nivat's figurative terms, "censored" (*Возвращение в Европу*, web source).

This inability is linked to the absence of such a discourse in society and culture at large, which actually works both ways. Authors are unable, or reluctant, to produce the discourse, while their target audience of consumers is neither interested in it nor prepared to stomach it, should it eventually appear. Very much like some of their beloved authors, many Russians cannot speak about sexual matters freely and openly, without either bashful giggles, "meaningful" reservations and hints or a moralistic jargon, which often, surprisingly enough, slips into the very banal vulgarity with which it is trying to stigmatize sexual matters.

At the same time, there does seem to exist a counterculture, or an alternative literary-intellectual tradition, in which a more reserved and sober attitude to sexuality and corporeality is manifest. In order to understand the genealogy and evolution of this alternative to mainstream culture of sexophobia and thinly veiled misogyny and sexism, one must go back to the Golden Age (Pushkin, Kukhelbeker, Yazykov, etc.) and conduct comparative studies of such nineteenth century authors as Tolstoy and Leskov. Such attempts have been made in Chapters 1 and 2 of this monograph. Now it is crucial to turn to a discussion of the Silver Age (1890–1921) as a formative period for Russia's literary discourses of carnality and eroticism and its impetus to the development of Russian literature in the twentieth century, particularly the émigré one. This is what I will strive to do in the present and subsequent chapters.

Most recently, discourses of sexuality and eroticism in the Silver Age were discussed by R. LeBlanc in his chapter "Carnality and Morality in Fin de Siecle and Revolutionary Russia" (*Slavic Sins of the Flesh* 158–209). While his analysis contains numerous interesting observations, his focus solely on Artsybashev's *Sanin* at the expense of Rozanov's philosophy, Sologub's poetry and prose, Andreyev's drama and short stories, etc. seems highly debatable. If LeBlanc had been familiar with Olga Matich's thoughtful takes on the Merezhkovskys' sexuality and outlooks (*Erotic Utopia* 162–211), he would not have called Zinaida Gippius and Dmitrii Merezhkovsky (along with Rozanov!) "contemporary advocates of erotic liberation and rehabilitation of the body" (*Slavic Sins of the Flesh* 162). Quite the opposite, the Merezhkovskys were Rozanov's opponents and followers of Solovyov's anti-sexual ideas.

Is All Russian Literature Anti-Carnal and Asexual?

A *Financial Times* article by Chrystia Freeland about sex-related TV shows in Russia was ironically challenged by Boris Paramonov, a former host

at *Radio Liberty* ("Svoboda"). Paramonov mocks Freeland for suggesting that the "liberated" Russian sexual culture of the 1990s resembles that of California in the 1960s and for being surprised that Russians still read and refer to nineteenth-century Russian literature. Freeland thinks that average Western audiences nowadays are, on the one hand, much more conservative and reserved about sex matters (Victorian family values are being ostensibly restored) and, on the other, not as well equipped with the knowledge of the literary heritage of their respective cultures.

However, as Paramonov brilliantly suggests, the intelligentsia's propensity for looking up and quoting the Russian classics on all occasions is a Sisyphean task in this case: THERE IS NOTHING TO LEARN ABOUT SEX, EROTICISM AND LOVE IN RUSSIAN LITERARY HISTORY.

Paramonov gives several examples to illustrate this point: one, perhaps the most vivid of all, is the case of Anna Akhmatova, a Russian poet with a liberal outlook, who was appalled by the publication of a memoir by Lyubov' Blok (the wife of Aleksandr Blok) simply because the latter allowed herself to provide the reader with some details of their everyday family life (Blok died a few years after the October revolution).[4]

Akhmatova happened to be particularly unhappy about the following phrase in the memoir: «Я откинула одеяло, и он любовался моим роскошным телом» / "I threw off the blanket and [Blok] enjoyed the beauty of my naked body." Ironically, this detail may have been among the most erotic ones in all of Russian literature, albeit written by a poet's wife in a memoir. Akhmatova dismisses it as "dirty" and "trivial" and hints quite transparently that Lyubov' Blok should have kept her mouth shut about her husband's "intimate life" since he was a great poet and she a mere woman. Although she may have been his "Muse" or his "Fair Lady," Mrs. Blok was not allowed to "blacken the memory of the great poet" by revealing his various illnesses (especially syphilis), sexual life, infidelity, homo- or bisexuality, etc. The "double standard" of all this is conspicuous: Akhmatova herself was bisexual and spent a lot of time with fellow lesbian / bisexual writers, for which she was rebuked by some of her

[4] Aleksandr and Lyubov Blok's marriage and intimate life are described in detail by Olga Matich in the chapter "The Case of A. Blok: Marriage, Genealogy, Degeneration," which contains a large amount of useful information about A. Blok's venereal disease (probably syphilis) and fear of sex and women (*Erotic Utopia* 89–125). However, considering Blok's friendship with the fellow symbolist poet Andrei Bely (who had an affair with Lyubov') in the light of the theory of "homosocial desire" does appear a little farfetched: there is no evidence that Bely and Blok were (homo)sexually attracted to each other in any fashion (*Erotic Utopia* 108).

more conservative, pro-communist colleagues ("Поэзия и правда секса," web source).

One must disagree with Paramonov, however, or at least try to nuance his verdict. It would be unfair to present *all* Russian discourses of modernity as strictly sexophobic, anti-carnal and / or anti-erotic. If one has to do justice to the whole body of Russian literature of the twentieth century, starting with the Silver Age, there, of course, would be other authors who constitute "exceptions" to Paramonov's rule. There have been quite a few writers, philosophers and critics who tried to grapple with making sense of human sexualities and thus produce the Russian-language discourse of carnality and eroticism. Many of these "deviant" authors have been accused both in their own culture and abroad of producing "literary pornography."

Before I turn to Pushkin's legacy of erotic and carnal anti-utopianism as it has been absorbed and developed in the Silver Age, it is important to discuss the term "pornography" as it applies to literature (and to textual media in general), and also consider an argument that in Russia the conception of pornography is in some way unique, i.e., different from the other cultures of the world.

I will then proceed to discussing a Golden Age text—Aleksandr Pushkin's tale *Golden Cockerel*—as a formative anti-utopian manifesto of Russian letters and then turn directly to some most emblematic works of such Silver Age authors as Fyodor Sologub, Leonid Andreyev, Mikhail Kuzmin, and Mikhail Artsybashev, as well as dwell on female literary discourses of sexual freethinking of the period.

Is Pornography Really an "Idea" in Russia?

Bill Thompson, a British sociologist of sexualities, addresses the problem of defining pornography in his 1994 book *Soft Core: Moral Crusades against Pornography in Britain and America* arguing that we often deal with an anachronistic understanding of it, which means little or nothing:

> Pornography's dictionary definition, much beloved by the ignorant, bears no relationship to its content, *and never did*. The fact that Victorians invented a new word to describe novels about men and women having sex, by sticking together two Greek words *porne* and *graphein*, which mean 'harlot' and 'to write,' tells us far more about Victorian attitudes to sexually active women than it does about the contents of any books. Contemporary definitions of erotica, obscenity, and pornography suffer from a similar prejudice. (Thompson 1)

Thompson goes on to suggest that many terms that usually accompany "pornography" are expected to reinforce its corrupting and depraving essence (such as "obscenity") but in reality are "moral-legal" terms, confusing in their ambiguity. He cites an example of two video dealers in Portsmouth who on the same day, in two adjacent courts, got diametrically opposite verdicts: one was found 'guilty' and the other 'not guilty' of spreading pornography, although the two have rented out the same erotic films (ibid.).

Most terms we tend to use in describing socio-cultural phenomena pertaining to human sexualities tend to be political / politicized, ideological and / or what Thompson calls "moral-legal." This tendency is very unfortunate for both literary and socio-cultural analysis as a commentator ends up being imprecise or even inaccurate. In the case of literary texts, we may thus misinterpret the author's poetic vision and ruin the whole point of literary criticism. Take the notorious notion of "pedophilia" as an example. Is Humbert Humbert of *Lolita* a pedophile? Or is he a *hebephile*, rather? What about Quilty? Is he a pedophile or a hebephile, or both? What is the difference (if any) between these two men's "pedophilias"? Why is Kevin Spacey's character in the film *American Beauty* (1999) called a pedophile by some critics and compared to Nabokov's Humbert, if the former was attracted to a 16–18 year old girl (most certainly past the age of consent)?[5] Maybe he was an *ephebophile*? Answers to these questions will inevitably depend on a respondent's ideological beliefs and

[5] Jason Merrill encourages his US undergraduate students to explore "parallels" between Sam Mendes's movie and Nabokov's novel. Students are expected to be enlightened by *Lolita* and perceive the Mendes movie "differently": now they have the "inside knowledge of the film's subtext." It is very unclear though what kind of parallels Merrill could find between Humbert and Lester Burnham. The latter man lusts after a *high school student* but this infatuation is part of his quest to rediscover his "lust for life" (to use the rock musician Iggy Pop's catchy phrase). We have no evidence that he is suffering from any "paraphilia": he is definitely NOT a "pedophile" as the girl, Angela, is well past the age of consent anyway; she is by no means a child. After all, a lot of 40-year-old men may once in a while be attracted to 18-year-old women—and vice versa. One should ask Merrill what he thinks is wrong with that. It is quite possible that having been taught to draw this sort of parallels, his students will go out of the classroom understanding *Lolita* much less than before they entered it (Kuzmanovich 59–60).

Jason Merrill's students might be glad to learn a second opinion on this sort of parallels from the following quote. Nabokov was asked by an interviewer to comment on the "immorality" of "Hollywood- and New York-style" pair bonds between aging men and young girls, "very little older than Lolita":

> . . . Cases of men in their forties marrying girls in their teens . . . have no bearing on *Lolita* whatever. Humbert was fond of "little girls"—not simply "young girls." Nymphets are girl-children, not starlets and "sex kittens." Lolita was twelve, not eighteen,

political sympathies. Just as the two video dealers in Portsmouth Thompson mentions, these characters will inevitably receive politically and morally biased assessments of their "bad behavior": just as many "real life" cultural figures suspected of pedophilia—Lewis Carroll, Charlie Chaplin, Roman Polanski, Michael Jackson, among many others, to use just British and American figures—all have.

Besides the well-known fact that no one can really agree on the difference between erotica and porn, soft core and hard core, the term "pornography" is further complicated by what its national or ethnic peculiarities within a given culture or diaspora ostensibly are.

Eliot Borenstein's recent discussion of pornography in post-Soviet Russian culture in his 2008 book *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* brings about a lot of questions and concerns about what we want this word to connote in the humanities and sheds light upon an obvious discrepancy in what it means in humanities versus social sciences. For Borenstein as a literary and cultural historian of Russia, discussing "sex and its metaphors" in contemporary Russia involves pornography and prostitution.

Drawing on Kornei Chukovsky's century-old assertion with regard to Artsybashev's 1908 novel *Sanin* (discussed below) that pornography in Russia is not "plain" porn like in Germany or France, but "PORNOGRAPHY WITH IDEAS," Borenstein argues that "in Russia, pornography is an idea," i.e., that it is a "category of meaning and content rather than simply form and function."

Borenstein actually has either taken the Chukovsky quote out of context or misunderstood his jocular tone: the latter is being ironic about the Artsybashev novel's poor artistic quality and may actually have used the word "pornography" sarcastically (after all, there are no frank erotic scenes in *Sanin* whatsoever; pretty much like in Tolstoy, all we know are the characters' thoughts *post-factum* / *post-coitum*, although Artsybashev is much less of a "sexophobe" than the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata*). Here is the Chukovsky quote with more context:

> Russian pornography is not just porn, like the French or German one but a pornography with an idea (*порнография с идеей*). Artsybashev does not simply depict Sanin's lustful acts (*сладострастные деяния*) but appeals to everybody to act lusfully. People must enjoy love without fear and prohibi-

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when Humbert met her . . . by the time she is fourteen, he refers to her as his "aging mistress." (*Strong Opinions* 93; emphasis added)

> tion, he says, and this word "must" is a remnant of the intelligentsia's habits of old, an anachronism of a moral code of former times, which is disappearing in front of our eyes. (Quoted in Kon, «Русский Эрос», web source)

When I discuss *Sanin* in what follows, I will claim that what Chukovsky may have meant here is that the novel is much more of a pamphlet calling for the recognition of sex for pleasure and gender equality rather than a genuine work of literary art.

The example on which Borenstein builds his argument (of "pornography as an idea" in Russia) is the Khruschev-Stalin anal sex scene from Vladimir Sorokin's *Голубое сало / Blue Lard* (1999) and the ensuing attacks on the novel by the Putinist youth organization *Moving Together*, followed by an unsuccessful attempt to charge Sorokin with pornography in 2003. Borenstein wonders why this "difficult novel" was considered pornographic, as in the West "charging a novelist with pornography seems almost quaint" (*Overkill* 52–53; emphasis added). He then goes on to claim that all Russian culture of the 1990s was saturated with pornography (film, TV, fiction, etc.) and concludes that "pornography has meaning" in Russia. It has proved it has strong connections to the "classical porn of the Enlightenment era in that it was overtly political and often connected to the satirical tradition." The author's questions are this: "Why should pornography be a battleground for Russia's soul? And why should the nation's soul be defined and redefined using sexualized representations of the female body?" He then answers these questions by postulating that in Russia, nationalism and pornography are to be consumed "in the same package," while the "depiction of sexualized bodies" somehow explores "a national idea" (*Overkill* 54–56).

It is unclear what Borenstein means by the term "pornography." It appears as if his definition would be similar to that of the *Moving Together* organization: a product of any media—printed, filmic or performative—that happens to contain "explicit" sex scenes and "obscene" words. These young Putinist activists, however, are just being nostalgic about the times of the Soviet Union when any meaningful reference to a person's sexual life was indeed called "pornography" in official publications. There exists one striking similarity between the two countries though: just like in the USSR, one can hardly see any nudity or realistically represented sex acts on the US cable television or in most Hollywood movies today. To a US-based observer, Russian culture of the 1990s might thus seem a little overly "sexualized" and "pornographized."

Second, it is important to bear in mind that free access to pornography in post-Soviet Russia is strongly associated with freedom and anti-totalitarianism (not so much with the Enlightenment's tradition of political satire, as the critic thinks). To use Borenstein's favorite example, not so many Russians would probably care to save some money to be able to afford a rubber model of the US porn star Jeff Stryker's penis, but it is meaningful to them that it is now available in any Moscow or Kaluga sex shop. It is true that certain aspects of pornography may differ from culture to culture, but it is hardly arguable that, unlike its French or American counterparts, Russian pornography is somehow about knowledge, ideas or the quest for truth. One of the chief functions of pornography in all cultures seems to be aiding its consumer to masturbate. In addition, it is not clear what Borenstein means by "Russia's soul" (he never defines this "term") and why pornography would be some kind of a "battleground" for this metaphysical entity.

It is important for my purposes here to bring up Vladislav Khodasevich's essay "O pornografii" / "About Pornography" (1932). Khodasevich was not only a perceptive and influential essayist but, most importantly for the thrust of this study, he was a poet and critic who influenced many younger contemporaries of his in the Russian émigré circles—most notably, Vladimir Nabokov who adored the poet and considered him the greatest one of his time (*Strong Opinions* 89, 223). It can be argued that the article "O pornografii" was known to Nabokov and may have paved the way to his conceiving of *Lolita*.

For example, Nabokov's thinly veiled attack on the critics who accused his novel of being pornographic in the afterword "On a Book Entitled Lolita" echoes Khodasevich's essay repeatedly:

> In modern times the term "pornography" connotes mediocrity, commercialism, and certain strict rules of narration. Obscenity must be mated with banality because every kind of aesthetic enjoyment has to be entirely replaced by simple sexual stimulation . . . In pornographic novels action has to be limited to the copulation of clichés. Style, structure, imagery should never distract the reader from his tepid lust. (*Lolita Annotated* 313)[6]

Khodasevich's argument is akin to Thompson's above: firstly, there are no pornographic plots or works of literature as such, he argues; there exist only pornographic aims and intentions of an author who employs certain

[6] On Nabokov's personal and literary connection to Khodasevich, see David Bethea's article "Nabokov and Khodasevich" (Alexandrov 452–463).

stylistic "devices" to stimulate his / her reader sexually. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the style of a literary work, not its plot:

> To direct the reader's imagination in such a way so that to evoke a straightforward, pure erotic feeling (*прямое, беспримесное эротическое чувство*)—this is the main goal of pornography, verbal or graphic . . . It must concentrate its efforts on this main goal and therefore must strive to divert the reader from all extraneous thoughts and impressions as much as possible . . . [The plot] acquires an independent and primary role in pornography. In this sense, pornography is close to reportage and adventure novel. (Khodasevich 296)

Secondly, Khodasevich warns critics that it is dangerous to call a literary work or even parts of this work "pornographic" (unless it is *aimed* at "arousing the instinct"), regardless of the amount and explicitness of erotic scenes therein. Conversely, he also posits the argument that Nabokov must have picked up from him: a writer's bad taste combined with erotic scenes may produce what he calls the "pornographic effect." As in the case of Artsybashev's novel, the fact that *Sanin* is artistically or poetically weak while being dedicated to erotic themes does not make it "pornographic": it just creates a pornographic effect. Very much like Mikhail Kuzmin's early novel *Wings*, it is a manifesto, a pamphlet to a larger extent than it is a work of art. No wonder then that these books (among many others) were adjudged by critics to being "pornographic shockers"—and yet, in Khodasevich's terms, this misreading of *Sanin* as literary pornography was a serious critical blunder.

The key ironic metaphor of Khodasevich's essay is that of American collectors who buy an antique statue of a naked woman / goddess and then clothe it in panties (Khodasevich 298). According to Georges Nivat, Khodasevich implies that this is precisely how one can unwittingly become a "pornographer" due to the lack of artistic taste and confusing "aim" with "device" (*Возвращение в Европу*, web source). It is beside the latter's point whether the collector is American, Russian or Chinese; as Nabokov would argue, "philistine vulgarity" can be characteristic of a proletarian from Chicago as much as of a European duke (*Lolita Annotated* 315). Whenever one tries to produce judgment on such a phenomenon as "pornography" in Russian culture, he or she might as well think of avoiding dressing up the figurative statue of Venus in some fancy but superfluous verbal "lingerie."

How can we avoid using this "loaded" term—pornography—incorrectly in cultural and literary studies? There seems to be only one solution: *not to use it in reference to literary texts at all*. It would be a great step forward

if we managed to restrict its usage to referring to adult movies and other audio-visual products, such as photos and images that are, for the most part, intended by its creators to be used as masturbation aids. Comparative literary studies would arguably be much better off if works that contain frank descriptions of sex scenes—e.g., Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Vladimir Sorokin's *Blue Lard*—were not referred to as being "obscene" or involving "elements of pornography." The use of sexual, corporeal and erotic imagery in these texts is usually interwoven with complex poetic, esthetic or thematic tasks their authors aim to fulfill; none of these tasks are reducible to sexual stimulation of the readers. Even if we assume that Sorokin, for instance, includes the Stalin-Khrushchev anal intercourse scene in his novel for some purposes other than creating another grotesque burlesque of Soviet history, we might need to think of another term for such sexually explicit descriptions, as the Victorian coinage *pornography* means either something entirely different or is so imprecise that it means nothing at all any longer.

A Weak Tsar, a Wise Castrate and a Beautiful Tsarina: A Mythologeme of Russian History?

As noted in previous chapters, the alternative tradition of a more receptive attitude to sexuality and corporeality dates back to the Golden Age of Russian literature—namely, to Aleksandr Pushkin. This counter-tradition is interwoven with another thread of Russia's intellectual history—that of *anti-utopianism*. According to Aleksandr Etkind, Pushkin's fairy tale / poem *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel* (1834) is the "first Russian anti-utopia" (*Содом и Психея* 135).

Of all Russian utopian projects, one of the pioneering and most influential ones was undoubtedly the ideology of the Skoptsy—*skopchestvo*—put forward by Kondratii Selivanov at the turn of the nineteenth century. I have discussed it at some length in *Chapter 1*, along with the importance of this sect for the Russian religious philosophy and literature of the Silver Age. The figure of the castrate-astrologer has since Pushkin's poem acquired an almost magical, prophetic status—very much due to the plot's most striking symbolic resemblance to one of the most tragic events in later Russian history—the union of Emperor Nicolas II and Empress Aleksandra with "the mad monk" Grigorii Rasputin in 1907–1916. Only a year after Rasputin had been brutally murdered by Nicolas's vigilant courtiers, the Bolshevik

revolution destroyed the monarchy and eventually no less brutally wiped out the Tsar and his family.[7]

In Pushkin's tale, Dadon, a lazy and aging tsar, is tired of his neighbors' constant treacherous attacks on his kingdom and summons a sage, a castrate-astrologer, for a solution to his unrest. The Castrate gives him a golden cockerel that is then placed on his palace's steeple and starts warning him of advancing foreign armies in time for his generals to repulse the invaders. Dadon vows that he would fulfill any wish of the Castrate at any time. He is able to live peacefully for a couple of years as his enemies are now wary of attacking his kingdom but then the cockerel announces a major alarm from the east. Dadon's elder son departs with a huge army to fight the enemy, and this is when events start happening cyclically—in eight-day intervals. Nothing is heard from the son, and in eight days he is followed by his younger brother and his regiment. Then, in another eight days, Dadon himself leads the remaining troops eastward and finds the two armies defeated and his sons dead. They have obviously stabbed each other in front of a large luxurious tent. A young beautiful woman emerges from it: she is the tsarina of Shemakha, we are told.[8] The lustful Dadon falls in love and feasts with her for a week before heading home. As he enters his capital, the Castrate confronts the tsar and demands the tsarina in return for his magic cockerel. Dadon is very upset: he tells the sage that there is a "limit to everything" (indeed, why would a castrate need a woman?)[9] and when the old man refuses to back off, he hits the sage with his mace. When the astrologer drops dead, the cockerel

[7] The only notable discrepancy between Pushkin's tale and the Rasputin story is that while the sage in the former was a castrate, the latter was famous for his virility and sexual prowess. In other words, Rasputin would seem to be a mystical fusion of Pushkin's castrate-astrologer and his powerful cock(erel). However, this similarity is of course just an historical coincidence, although it is always tempting to suppose that it is a meaningful one.

[8] Very importantly, the Shemakha was an area in the Transcaucasia (now a museum in Azerbaijan) annexed to the Russian empire in the early nineteenth century. In earlier versions of the poem both the castrate and the girl are said to be from the Shemakha. Etkind points out that this is the place where Russian *skoptsy* were actually exiled. This means that the astrologer is a Russian *skopets* who tries to pass for an Oriental eunuch (we later learn that he wears a Saracenic / Arabian hat). Whether one agrees with the critic's guesswork or not, it is obvious that Pushkin is alluding to the Russian sect (*Содом и Психея* 164).

[9] Pushkin certainly knew, however, that some emasculated men do continue to experience sexual desire, which means there is nothing outrageous about the astrologer's request to give him the girl (if he meant her for sex, of course).

flies off the steeple, lands on Dadon's head and pecks his forehead killing him on the spot. A laughing tsarina of Shemakha and the cockerel then evaporate as if they never in fact existed. This tale, Pushkin tells his readers, has an implicit moral in tow that is supposed to be a lesson for "fine young men" / «добрым молодцам урок» (*Сказка о золотом петушке* 307–309).

Etkind's reading of this dark, apocalyptic tale is as follows: Dadon's decision to hire the help of the Castrate implies his attempted union with a representative of the common people (*chelovek iz naroda*) who happens to be a castrate. All emphasis should be placed on the fact that the tsar doesn't want to give the girl to the astrologer and is thus able to retain his sexuality but he has to die instantly because one cannot rely on a castrate's assistance and "preserve" his sexuality. In addition, one who would like to change "nature" (by "nature," Etkind probably means corporeality and carnality) for the sake of power will have to confront his own nature, his own sexuality. A MAN'S WELL-BEING CANNOT BE ESTABLISHED AT THE EXPENSE OF HIS LOST SEXUALITY. *Skoptsy* and their projects will not bring any happiness either to tsars or to "fine young men." Dadon's revolt against the Castrate and his punishing cockerel happens too late as he refuses to give up the tsarina and return to his sexless paradise under the watchful eye of the cockerel (*Содом и Психея* 134–135; *Хлыст* 123).

Etkind adds another interesting hypothesis: in his tale Pushkin may have implicated the union of Selivanov with Emperor Pavel, who neglected the castrate's advice and was eventually assassinated. His two sons, however, did not die in youth but became the next tsars of Russia. Emperor Aleksandr Pavlovich did in fact consult Selivanov during the Patriotic War of 1812 and on some other important political issues (*Содом и Психея* 164–169).

It is hard to disagree with Etkind's interpretation; it is possible to push it a step further though. Indeed, Pushkin appears to be making fun of a characteristically Russian idea that societal happiness can be achieved via stripping each individual citizen's body of its natural urges and desires, somehow canceling the institution of family and discarding human sexuality. How does one achieve this happiness? Through the project of *skopchestvo*—first, one emasculates oneself and then deprives others of their sexualities. But Pushkin's irony is precisely in the fact that neither is fully feasible: the old astrologer is a castrate but wants the young woman anyway; the old Dadon realizes that he might lose the protection of his "vigilante" cockerel (almost a Batman figure that has devolved into a "dark knight," to use the US popular culture references) but refuses to give up

his awakened sexuality in the form of the tsarina of Shemakha. In other words, "carnal desire" is more important to both men than anything else: safety, wisdom, wealth, power and—last but not least—life itself. Just as will be the case with Sologub's Peredonov in *The Petty Demon*, his Mafalda in "The Tsarina of Kisses," Ivan Bunin's Olia Meshcherskaya in "Light Breathing" (1916), and Vladimir Nabokov's Humbert Humbert, Pushkin seems to be arguing that the grip of a person's sexuality on his or her actions and thoughts is so firm that a person can hardly claim that (s)he keeps it in check.

Apart from that, it would be interesting to know why the woman—the tsarina of Shemakha—is such a schematic, underdeveloped character in this tale, merely an instrument in the hands of the Castrate, just like the cockerel, in Etkind's opinion (*Содом и Психея* 168–9). All we know about her is that she was appealing sexually and ready to please the monarch. After all, Pushkin is often hailed as a champion of representing female sexuality in a much more detailed fashion.[10] The tsarina personifies sexual desire and the pleasurable aspect of sexuality but it is really important for Pushkin to portray her as an Oriental (i.e., foreign, non-Russian—not belonging to Russian aristocracy but nothing similar to the common people either). Unlike Dadon (a collective image of Russian tsars), the astrologer (who is a Russian *skopets* pretending to be an Oriental) and his faithful cockerel (who is an ornithological symbol of his removed genitals now living a life of their own), the tsarina of Shemakha is the only non-Russian character in the whole tale who arrives in the capital with the infatuated Dadon, somewhat unwittingly causes the deaths of both Russian men (whose only fault is that they both have tried to control her) and finally she just evaporates as if she were a hallucination or dream. The tsarina's story is a powerful metaphor for the ephemeral character of pleasurable sexuality in Russia and for all the cultural predicaments associated with importing it from the East or the West.[11]

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[10] This limited representation of the tsarina may have had to do more with the original folk tale Pushkin used but, in any event, it remains not fully clear why this character is not developed; for instance, there is little or no detail on the way she looked like, no reference to her *ножки* / *little legs*, which is rather unusual for Pushkin.

[11] This foreign, alien character of sex for pleasure, the way sexophobia merges with xenophobia in a Russian setting, is aptly expressed—albeit in a later, Soviet, system of ideological coordinates—by Zakhar Pavlovich in Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur* (1929) when he tries to educate Sasha Dvanov (I quoted this passage in full in Epigraph to *Chapter 1*): "Any man has the whole imperialism sitting in his bottom part . . ." (*Чевенгур* 78).

Pushkin's last macabre tale in verse has set up a counter-tradition of antiutopianism refuting the claim that a happier society could be built at the expense of disposing of human sexuality and other "bodily needs." Chapter 2 contended that the later projects of Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov were oblivious, or negligent, of *Golden Cockerel*'s antiutopianism (yet one may encounter a more "Pushkinist" poetic in Nikolai Leskov). It is also observable that this poem's message is clearly at odds with the philosophy of Fyodorov, Solovyov, or Berdyaev. Nevertheless, we will see how this message is echoed and advanced in the works of Kuzmin, Bunin, Nabokov and other authors to be discussed in what follows here and in the following chapter.[12]

Female Discourses of Sexualities. Manifestos of Sex for Pleasure: Mikhail Kuzmin and Mikhail Artsybashev

As I have mentioned in the previous chapters, the Silver Age was a unique period of epistemological rupture when different intellectual tendencies and religious cultures merged and / or clashed with each other. In relation to carnality and eroticism, a decisive breakthrough of antiutopian thinking became possible thanks to the philosophy of sexualities put forward by Vasilii Rozanov. It is clear now, after almost a century, that Rozanov was a paramount, most influential intellectual figure of the Silver Age and maybe of the entire twentieth century: some most interesting literary and philosophical endeavors of very different authors from Vladimir Solovyov and Fyodor Sologub to Aleksei Remizov and Andrei Bely and Nikolai Berdyaev to, after Rozanov's death in 1918, Andrei Platonov and Evgenii Zamyatin were undertaken in dialogue with Rozanov, regardless of whether each of them sought to refute and undermine or embrace and develop his provocative controversial ideas about sex and gender.

Perhaps one of the peculiar traits of Rozanov's worldview was his presumed homophobia, i.e., his constant equating of "sodomy" (that is, homosexuality) with "asceticism" and all sorts of anti-family, anti-procreative, anti-sex ideologies. First of all, it should be borne in mind that Rozanov definitely did not *hate* homosexuality as much as he *misunderstood* it.[13]

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[12] For Pushkin's influence on the Silver Age, see Irina Paperno's essay "Pushkin v zhizni cheloveka Serebrianogo veka" (Gasparov 19–51).

[13] Yet the apt euphemistic metaphor Rozanov created for homosexuals, *люди лунного света / people of moonlight*, seems to have had a lasting impact upon the Russian language

Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* that around 1870 (when Westphal's pioneering article was published) in Western Europe "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality . . . The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species." Following the appearance of a huge amount of scholarship and all kinds of discourses on homosexuality, a "reverse" discourse emerged: "homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (*The History of Sexuality. Volume 1* 43, 101). As I argued in Chapter 1, nothing of the sort ever happened in Russia; to this day homosexuality continues to be actively pathologized by the medical, political and even literary / artistic communities. Homophobia in Russia is very intense, diverse and ubiquitous, but it is crucial to see it in the overall context of fear and hatred of the sexual, the fleshly, the corporeal, which, if we agree with Etkind, has always been a key element of Russian utopian thinking at least since the end of the seventeenth century.

A common mistake some researchers make is to see the first decades of the Bolshevik / Communist rule as some sort of a golden age of sexual freedom in Russia. Malmstad and Bogomolov refute such claims in their book on Kuzmin when they mention a naïve belief of Magnus Hirschfield, a famous German sexologist and apologist of homosexuality, that the Soviet Union was an emancipationist paradise for gays. The latter visited Leningrad in 1926 "dying to meet" Kuzmin. When he finally met Kuzmin and Nikolay Klyuev (another gay poet mentioned in Chapter 1), they found the professor "pompous and naïve." Malmstad and Bogomolov agree that Hirschfield really misunderstood Bolshevism:

> The regime saw homosexuality not as a crime but as a perversion, a form of mental illness to be cured. Throughout the 1920s, the People's Commissariat for Public Health waged "enlightenment campaigns" that were designed to eradicate it, along with masturbation, premarital sex, and other forms of "unnatural behavior." (*Mikhail Kuzmin* 348)

Although Rozanov may have misunderstood homosexuality, he was not a homophobe *per se* but, rather, saw "sodomy" as one of the forms of non-reproductive sexuality he generally disapproved of. At the same time, he

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and culture, producing even the current colloquial term for gay people *голубые* / the "blue people" (just as moonlight is bluish in color), as both Kon and Etkind note (see Etkind's "Тайный код для заблудившегося пола," 80).

did not deny the importance of sex for pleasure but still considered it secondary to human sexuality's procreative function.

Female Fictional Libertinage: Tsvetayeva, Zinovieva-Annibal, Verbitskaya and Nagrodskaya

Before turning to Kuzmin's *Wings* and Artsybashev's *Sanin* as manifestos supporting pleasurable sexuality, homosexual and heterosexual respectively, it is important to touch upon female literary discourses of sexual freethinking (libertinage) in the Silver Age. To at least gesture toward filling that gap, let me briefly discuss several texts that incorporate homo-, hetero- and bi-sexual eroticism usually grouped under the rubric of women's writing of the period.

As far as pioneering lesbian writing is concerned, Marina Tsvetayeva's cycle *Подруга / Girlfriend* (1914–15) stands out as a collection of poetic texts in which carnality and corporeality are celebrated unequivocally. These seventeen poems addressed to Sofia Parnok, a fellow poet and the author's lover, were not published in Tsvetayeva's lifetime, but it is safe to suppose that many literati and intellectuals were familiar with them. The young poet admired Rozanov and was known to be in correspondence with him during the affair with Parnok. I would argue that the cycle was created in dialogue with Rozanov's philosophy of sexualities.

The Tsvetayeva text more often (and justifiably) quoted as being inspired by Rozanov is the philosophical essay "Letter to the Amazon" (1932–34), written in French and addressed to the American-French writer Natalie Barney, who held a fashionable literary salon in Paris; both authors revered Sappho, in the common trope of the era. But Tsvetayeva argued that, whereas a lesbian woman does not experience sexual attraction to men, her desire to bear offspring is unconquerable. According to Russian scholar I.V. Brylina, the poet echoes Rozanov directly when she writes: «Два будет трое» / "Two will make three" («Письмо к амазонке» 62–76; Brylina 103). In addition, Tsvetayeva alludes to Rozanov's belief that Christianity, the Christian God, is incommensurable with "fleshly love."

Tsvetayeva's contribution to female discourses of sexual freethinking in *Girlfriend* is arguably twofold. On the one hand, she highlights the inadequacy of heterosexual standards and clichés in representing love between two women and thus warns against stigmatizing and demonizing it, especially in poem #2, in which she eloquently discards the heteronormative stereotypes of a sexual attraction and relationship between man and woman ("hunter" v. "prey," "scorer" v. the object of scoring, the common

trope about a man needing to "win" a woman's heart and body) as being totally irrelevant to love and sex between two women. The poem also deconstructs and introduces ambiguity into the assumption that a lesbian relationship invariably involves a manly and a womanly partner ("butch" and "femme," in the stereotype of Barney's circles). In Tsvetayeva's exquisite turn of phrase, there is an "ironic delight" in "you being not a he" (*Стихотворения и поэмы* 176–77).

On the other hand, Tsvetayeva's cycle was arguably one of the very few examples of explicit eroticism in Russian high poetry since Pushkin and his generation. Several poems are replete with refreshing sensuous and fleshly imagery devoid of the trademark Russian sarcasm or grotesque burlesques, although the bisexual author is definitely ambivalent, sometimes darkly humorous, about her affair with Parnok, a somewhat older young woman who may not have fully reciprocated the young poet's affection (the sense of imminent separation and growing mutual estrangement is ubiquitous): "I love you for . . . your inspired seductions" (poem # 1); "[your] mouth is innocent and depraved as a monstrous flower" (# 6); "you caressed each of my curls hugging my head"; "I moved my sleepy cheek against your slender fingers"; "you teasingly called me a boy" (#7). There is also a fascinating metaphor for the lyrical heroine promising to her lover that she will steal the Virgin Mary icon her companion liked from the cathedral into which the two had languidly wandered (#7). Quite predictably for someone ironic about the way the fleshly is portrayed in the Russian Orthodox tradition, and in the spirit of the above-quoted Rozanov on Russian religious painting, the image is depicted as "mellow and emaciated," with "gloomy eyes" (*Стихотворения и поэмы* 176–81).

It is often claimed that many authors of Russia's Silver Age displayed a freedom of sexual expression and thought, but hardly any other poet of the period reaches the heights of celebrating eroticism that are present in Tsvetayeva's *Girlfriend*. True, there had been female authors of the same or older generations who may have been equally attentive to homosexual attraction / lesbianism, eroticism, bi-sexuality, etc.—for example, Zinovieva-Annibal, Verbitskaya, and Nagrodskaia (briefly discussed below),—all of whom must have influenced the young poet. But it is also conspicuous that many of her poetic rivals (such as Gippius and Akhmatova, among others—both bisexual as well) were more reticent and apparently less committed to exploring the "mysteries" of sexualities than Tsvetayeva was.

Several important prose texts written by women and representing discourses of sexual freethinking are found in the period, as well. In 1907 Lidia Zinovieva-Annibal, the poet Vyacheslav Ivanov's wife, published her novella *Тридцать три урода / Thirty-three Abominations*. This openly lesbian work is a crucial predecessor for Tsvetayeva's *Girlfriend* as a literary manifesto of lesbianism. Nonetheless, bearing in mind its didacticism and somewhat bombastic, flowery style and language, I would not go as far as to compare the two works of vastly different artistic merit. The Zinovieva-Annibal novella reads as a laudatory literary illustration to the well-known anti-sex ideas of Russian religious philosophers (most notably Solovyov and Fyodorov): homosexual attraction between women is posited as a viable alternative to heterosexual, procreative marriage. Both characters (the narrator and Vera, a renowned actress) speak in unison about the depravity of a world run by males; both have had extremely traumatic experiences with their fathers; Vera is disappointed in her previous experiment with marriage (not surprisingly, her husband and a two-year-old baby died a while ago and are now out of the way). Lesbian unions are thus also considered superior because they do not lead to childbirth and so ostensibly provide for more authentic erotic love experiences. The novella does contain some monotonous, trivial and melodramatic references to beautiful long legs, shapely necks, fine skin and exquisite shoulders (Zinovieva-Annibal 36–38, 50), but it is arguably much closer in its straightforward welcoming of "deviant" sexual relationships of two women to Mikhail Kuzmin's homoerotic *Wings* (discussed in some detail below) rather than to Tsvetayeva's poetic vision.

Anastasia Verbitskaya's serialized "boulevard" novel *Ключи счастья / The Keys to Happiness* (1913) is aptly analyzed by Laura Engelstein and will not be specifically discussed here. Its main message expressed by Mania, the protagonist, can be best summarized in her own words: "You men have taken the keys to happiness . . .But we [women] will finally obtain them! Putting love in second place—that is the key to happiness." Another character, Steinbach, tells us that he "decided to liberate [the woman] from the yoke of love" (quoted in Engelstein *The Keys to Happiness* 409). A careful reader will notice that such sententious ideas are not original and could have been borrowed from Meri in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *Prologue* (discussed briefly in *Chapter 2*). The important difference is that, while Meri was a housemaid moving up on the social ladder, Verbistkaya's "gender rebel" (as Engelstein calls Mania) is an artist, i.e., represents the class of urban intelligentsia.

Finally, perhaps a more sophisticated example of how both heterosexual and homosexual female fictional discourses could be rendered was Evdokia Nagrodskaia's novel *Гнев Диониса* / *The Wrath of Dionysus* (1910), also ascribed by some to the class of "boulevard fiction" (Engelstein *The Keys to Happiness* 399). I will refrain from such taste judgments upon the novel's literary quality.

Aleksandra Kollontai, the socialist leader mentioned in the previous chapters, was understandably very upset at the novel's conclusion, when Tatiana, an artist and the novel's "new woman," retreats to domestic love toward the end of the book (Engelstein *The Keys to Happiness* 399). Indeed, Tatiana is a woman who has some traits that are traditionally ascribed to men: for instance, her half-Jewish, half British husband Edgar Stark accuses her at some point of being attracted only to his body, not to his whole self that loves her deeply and dearly (Nagrodskaia 114). She doesn't quite realize this discrepancy herself, until her friend Latchinov, himself a closeted homosexual, explains to her that she is actually a "man with a woman's body." He adds that in fact she should have been a lesbian (Nagrodskaia 182–83). The "Latchinov theory" at first worries Tatiana's mind but then surprisingly helps her peacefully retreat into her family union, with her effeminate husband and their male child (she even stops painting). Kollontai, of course, would have preferred her to become a revolutionary like herself and never abandon the public sphere. The only thing Tatiana can never agree with in Latchinov's "theory" is that she could, or should, be a lesbian instead of settling for this unfulfilling private sphere.

Nagrodskaia's message may actually be more intricate than this thumbnail has indicated: whereas Latchinov is clearly a homosexual whose life has been ruined by his inability to come out of the closet, Tatiana is a "new woman," not in the sense that she is necessarily a feminist or a suppressed lesbian, but because the author would like to portray her as engaged in a reversal of traditional gender roles between her protagonist and Stark. Tatiana is a woman who is very rational, cold-blooded, resolute and full of initiative. Stark, on the contrary, is good-looking but weak, hysterical, passive. The novel ends with Tatiana recalling (and concurring with) the late Latchinov's reassurance that she was nonetheless a "lucky woman" (Nagrodskaia 191)—if, indeed, she was a woman in her emotional life at all.

In other words, Nagrodskaia's position may not be necessarily homophobic, misogynistic or anti-feminist. Just like Tsvetayeva of a younger generation, she may have felt the need to represent the continuum of heterosexual

and homosexual love and shifting gender identity more completely and insightfully than her contemporaries Zinovieva-Annibal or Verbitskaya did. *The Wrath of Dionysus* may therefore be a more modern—and modernizing—literary phenomenon that many diverse researchers and critics (including Kollontai and Engelstein) have taken it to be.

Despite the dissimilar artistic or intellectual merits of some of these female fictional discourses of sexualities and sexual freethinking throughout the Silver Age and beyond, ranging from the highbrow accomplished poetry and philosophical essayism of Tsvetayeva to the so-called boulevard fiction of Nagrodskaia, it would be, in my opinion, counterproductive for literary historians of the period not to notice the naïve but ultimately sexually enlightening and liberating ideas some of these authors were able to put forward in their writings. I will now turn to the male contributions, of which the two most influential ones were those of Mikhail Kuzmin and Mikhail Artsybashev.

Kuzmin's Challenge to Literary "Heteronormativity"

One of the pioneering courageous attempts to create homoerotic and "homoromantic" discourse in Russia at the turn of the century was undertaken by the openly gay poet Mikhail Kuzmin (1872–1936). Kuzmin's short novel *Wings* (1906) is an excellent example of a text that echoes Rozanov's thought, both in the polemical and acquiescent modes.

For example, one of the novel's characters, an Italian named Orsini, defines asceticism in what seems to be purely Rozanovian terms: "Asceticism is essentially the most unnatural phenomenon, and the chastity of certain animals is pure fiction." (*Крылья* 141–2)[14]

It is also a crucial early manifesto of the then emergent Russian homosexual discourse—as are three of Kuzmin's later texts: a short collection of erotic poems *Pictures Under Wraps* (1918), fourteen playfully wanton minimalist anecdotes in prose known as "A Stove in a Bathhouse" (1926), and a late cycle of poems *The Trout Breaking Through the Ice* (1929). *Wings* is not only a powerful statement for normalizing homoerotic and homosexual desire, but also a manifesto of non-reproductive, pleasurable sexuality, "sex for sex's sake" in general.

[14] On the other hand, according to Olga Matich, the character of Shtrup explicitly polemicizes with Rozanov's ideas when he attacks the Old Testament's focus on procreation and anti-aesthetic bias (Paperno 37–38).

At the thematic center of the short novel there is a monologue by one of the characters (perhaps it was Shtrup, the major ideological hero, but it is not specified by the narrator) in a gay men's gathering at a Petersburg apartment that confirms Kuzmin's adherence to "aesthetic paganism" at the time:

> We are Hellenes: the intolerant monotheism of the Hebrews is alien to us . . . Love has no goal apart from itself . . . Those who link the conception of the beauty with the beauty of a woman in the eyes of a man show only vulgar lust . . . We are Hellenes, lovers of the beautiful, the bacchants of a life to come . . . (Quoted in *Mikhail Kuzmin* 76–77)

Malmstad and Bogomolov call *Wings* a "gay *roman à thèse*" and argue convincingly that most statements Kuzmin makes in this novel –such as the just quoted one—are actually far more categorical than his actual views; he was very much a religious person of Christian beliefs in kindness, morality, generosity, tolerance, etc. Etkind documents his deep interest in the Russian sect of *Khlysty*, for instance. Indeed, following Goethe, Kuzmin opposed the "harsh alternative" between sensual pleasure and spiritual peace Schiller had insisted on (*Хлыст* 303–311). As Vanya Smurov, the novel's eighteen-year-old protagonist, is discovering his homosexuality, he is trying to "steer a course between hedonism . . . and asceticism," the extremes that are both condemned in the novel (*Mikhail Kuzmin* 78).

The plot of Kuzmin's *roman à thèse* is built around four major moments of "crisis" that drive this somewhat underdeveloped, schematic narrative of the orphan (both real and symbolic) Vanya's "coming of age," or, rather, "coming out;" but, as Malmstad and Bogomolov are quick to remind us, there is no equivalent for the latter expression in Russian (*Mikhail Kuzmin* 95). The first one occurs when Vanya almost witnesses the scene of a young Jewish girl Ida's suicide after she accidentally walks in on Larion Shtrup, a middle-aged "semi-Englishman," having sex with his lackey Fyodor. Kuzmin very subtly hints to the reader that Vanya is much less upset about the immature death of the woman than he is jealous of Shtrup preferring Fyodor the *muzhik* to himself. Vanya is so offended that he decides to move to the country and never see his older companion again. The second critical moment happens when Vanya is approached by Maria Dmitrievna, a good-looking 30-year-old friend (or maybe a family member—the novel is written so hastily that sometimes it is unclear who these minor characters in fact are), who tries to seduce him but gets "Let me go, you disgusting broad (*противная баба*)!" in response (*Крылья* 139). Interestingly, prior to this incident, Vanya seemed to like

the woman's company and enjoy conversing with her. Psychological portraits of the novel's heroes are so fragmented and unconvincing that it is unclear why such a well-educated and polite boy as Vanya could not come up with a less offensive way of rejecting the unfortunate Maria.

The third major episode occurs when having reconciled with Shtrup, Vanya and his ideological mentor observe a scene at a railway station in Italy involving a heterosexual love triangle of two women competing for the affection of a handsome young artist who, unsurprisingly, attracts the attention of Vanya and his homosexual friends. Having seen a lot of tears and corny drama, Vanya sarcastically remarks: "It's as if we have just been to a funeral." Shtrup quickly reacts to that with an improvised truism: "There are people who every minute are as though at their own [funerals]" (*Крылья* 154). Finally, the fourth "moment of truth" happens when Vanya feels that his Platonic "wings" have started to grow upon being invited to leave for Bari with Shtrup (which probably will entail his coming out and becoming Shtrup's permanent partner) and complains to the object of his affection that although he is happy, "it really hurts as [the wings] grow." In the morning of their joint departure, Vanya opens his window "into the street soaked in bright sunlight" (*Крылья* 158–9).[15]

Kuzmin was a poet, not a novelist, and as a short novel of self-development (*Bildungsroman*) or even as a *roman à thèse, Wings* is a weak one. It lacks well-written conflicts of ideas, psychological portraits of characters or any convincing, well-organized plotlines. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that Malmstad and Bogomolov discuss it on the same plane with Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and works of Gide, Proust, etc. As was just seen from the described episodes, Kuzmin's accomplishment must be put into the Russian context of institutionalized homophobia and total absence of vocabulary to express homoerotic (or heteroerotic, for that matter) desire and tradition of building "homoromantic" narratives. Although one does find homoerotic imagery in Kuzmin's predecessors and contemporaries (such as Sologub discussed here or Aleksandr Blok, Nikolai Klyuev, Marina Tsvetayeva, etc.), his bold attempt to create a text advocating pleasurable sexuality and normalizing homosexual themes is of course of revolutionary importance for the formation of discourses of sensuality and corporeality. And yet what Malmstad and Bogomolov have called the "same-sex messianism" in Kuzmin is achieved at the expense

[15] For an exploration of allusions to Plato's dialogues (such as *Phaedrus*) in Kuzmin's text, see Donald Gillis's article "The Platonic Theme in Kuzmin's *Wings*."

of a rather tendentious portrayal of heterosexuality in the novel: all heterosexual women (i.e., all the female characters) are somehow unattractive, vulgar, stupid and vain. Heterosexual affection is shown as being banal, shallow, and merely lustful. It is very symptomatic, nevertheless, that even most perceptive and unbiased of Kuzmin's contemporaries—such as Andrei Bely or Zinaida Gippius, whom Malmstad and Bogomolov quote—berated the novel not because of its weaknesses but due to their disgust with its main theme (i.e., homosexuality). Blok, however, seems to have misread the message of Kuzmin's pamphlet altogether when he dismissed the idea that the latter was an "advocate, . . . carrier of some dangerous ideas" (*Mikhail Kuzmin* 94). It is quite clear now, as it was then, that Kuzmin's ideas were in fact quite dangerous and "untimely" for his country in the early twentieth century.

Kuzmin's later work is, of course, much more complicated; however, at times he felt free to indulge in Pushkin-style light-minded, highly ironic and self-ironic, wanton poetry and prose. In the poem collection *Pictures Under Wraps* published in 1918 and in the humorous prose collection "A Stove in a Bathhouse" (1926) that influenced Aleksandr Vvedensky, Daniil Kharms and their "Oberiuty" group in the 1930s, he showed much more artistry and subtlety in representing homosexual and heterosexual themes.

Malmstad and Bogomolov aptly observe that one of the key peculiarities of Kuzmin's creative philosophy is that "at a time of cataclysmic social change, he asserted the importance of the most intimate sphere of life" (*Mikhail Kuzmin* 261). The novel *Wings*, written during the 1905 revolution, should be seen as a unique attempt to draw the society's attention to the problem of homosexuality but also as an assertion of the importance of pleasurable sexuality in general, of the fact that the body could be a source of joy and happiness, not just a "cage for the human spirit" as most of his coevals must have thought. Here one would undoubtedly discern the influence of Vasilii Rozanov's philosophy of sex that should not be underestimated but also Kuzmin's apparent sensitivity to what I have termed the anti-utopian (counter)tradition of Russian literature represented by such authors as Pushkin and Leskov, both of whom were amongst Kuzmin's favorite writers throughout his life.

Sanin *and its Social Context*

The Silver Age, or, more precisely, the period between two Russian revolutions 1905–1917, was marked not only by a dramatic increase of erotic

literature and the arts and first attempts to discuss gender inequality openly, but also a soaring increase of all kinds of attacks on sex and eroticism from different political and professional groups based invariably on naïve beliefs in traditional gender roles and lack of knowledge about human sexuality. Igor Kon quotes a speaker at an all-Russian congress against prostitution, a pediatrician Kankarovich, who claimed that boys who had read Jules Verne's novels dreamed of adventures and often ran away from home; detective stories bred criminals; while erotic art and literature aroused sexual instincts and created libertines. Natalia Goncharova, a female artist, was sued for several rather innocent nude paintings—in all probability, just because she was a woman as no male artists were ever brought to court on similar charges.[16] Literary critics, in their turn, were so shocked by the unusual explicit erotic scenes in new novels of Verbitskaya, Artsybashev, and others that they always failed to notice the author's real message («Русский эрос», web source). Eric Naiman mentions a physician with Bolshevik leanings, Dr. Omelchenko, who professed a deep knowledge of monogamous sexuality under communism and in 1908 argued that young men and women should not have sex before the age of 23 and then form a relationship that will last "to the grave." Meanwhile, "public statements about . . . sex began to be perceived as an essential component of *intelligent*'s worldview, and the interplay between sexual and political desires had become a crucial topic with which the writer depicting a better world (or the path thereto) had consciously to grapple" (*Sex in Public* 56, 45).

It is in this social context that one of the most scandalous and immensely popular at the time novels of Russian decadence, Mikhail Artsybashev's *Sanin* (1907), should be discussed.[17] When it was first published, it was received as a "primer on how to live" and likened to the abovementioned Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* and Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* Naiman is absolutely right when he remarks that the "most important factor behind *Sanin*'s appeal was probably not its eroticism but its

[16] See a detailed discussion of Goncharova's trial in Jane Sharp's "Redrawing the Margins of Russian Vanguard Art: Natalia Goncharova's Trial for Pornography in 1910" (Costlow 97–123).

[17] Ronald LeBlanc recently wrote on Artsybashev's novel in the context of the author being indebted to the metaphor of food in Tolstoy. In his judgment, it is closely related to suppressed sexuality in such writers as Gogol or Tolstoy. See his article "Artsybashev's *Sanin* as a Response to Tolstoy and Tolstoyism," and his monograph *Slavic Sins of the Flesh* (165–177). See also Otto Boele's essay "The Pornographic *Roman à Thèse*: Mikhail Artsybashev's *Sanin*" (Levitt 300–37) and "Artsybashev's *Sanin*: A Reappraisal" by Nicholas Luker.

pretense to ideological coherence" (*Sex in Public* 48). The novel's protagonist, Vladimir Sanin, appears to be a heterosexual version of Larion Shtrup in Kuzmin: both are ideologues of an emerging new epoch of "free love" and hedonism, albeit differently understood by their respective creators (Artsybashev was obviously a heterosexual author). This novel is yet another *roman à thèse* that is, in my opinion, even less successful artistically than Kuzmin's *Wings* or Nagrodskaia's *The Wrath of Dionysus*.

One of the numerous weaknesses of the novel is that it reveals the author's morbid obsession with sex-related violence, rape, murder and especially suicide. Women are presented as innocent, vulnerable creatures that are exposed to male cruelty and sexual molestation. Artsybashev's intent may have been satirical, but three successful and one unsuccessful suicides in the course of one summer in one small Russian town is something definitely over the top. Most men are presented as young, extremely virile and attractive; women are almost all stunningly good-looking, passive but secretly eager to experiment with sex. In any event, this novel can be interesting for my purposes as an ideological document of its epoch.

Naiman seems to have taken this novel too seriously from an esthetic standpoint, overstates its rather superficial debt to Nietzsche, and ends up interpreting the book as a statement of "male aggrandizement and female humiliation." For Naiman, Artsybashev "equates free love with rape," obliterates "female personality," while the "explicit detail," with which the author presents fantasies of violent men "betrays a fascination, from which the narrative cannot tear itself away." Finally, the critic goes as far as to suggest that Sanin's "sexual conquest" of Karsavina implies him willing to drown her as Stepan Razin did with a captured Persian princess in a song the protagonist happened to be humming at some point in the book (*Sex in Public* 49–51).

In other words, Naiman accuses *Sanin*'s author of preaching misogyny and promoting sex-related violence, such as rape. We are discussing *Sanin* here as a heavily didactic *roman à thèse*, as an ideological statement and must give it the credit it deserves for being a rather accurate "sociological" portrayal of the disappointed, apathetic younger intelligentsia in the wake of the 1905 bourgeois revolution. There are various misogynistic opinions voiced in the novel (mainly by the sadistic Captain Zarudin), but are Sanin the main ideologue's views really those of a woman-hater?[18] He tells

[18] Otto Boele in his recent monograph on *Sanin*'s reception in Russia agrees with Naiman in highlighting "misogynistic overtones of the novel," but at the same time

Karsavina before he has sex with her: "Human being (*человек*) is a harmonious combination of body and spirit until it has been disturbed . . . We have branded bodily needs as animal instincts (*животностью*), began to be ashamed of them, clothed them into a humiliating form and created a one-sided existence" (*Санин* 303). There is little or nothing strictly sexist or "masculinist" in this philosophy; it applies and refers to both women and men as equals.[19]

As Laura Engelstein argues convincingly, "[Sanin's] special role in the narrative is to convince young women who have succumbed to desire that their impulses have improved rather than degraded them" (*The Keys to Happiness* 385).

Sanin's intercourse with Karsavina is fully consensual, and Naiman's conclusions about Sanin's symbolically "drowning" her appear unfounded. There is nothing violent or humiliating in the sex they have on a boat, regardless of the fact that they *both* feel ashamed of it *post coitum*. Yes, Karsavina is in love with Svarozhich who is struggling with his performance anxiety and is unable to have intercourse with her despite their mutual desire, but does not it happen in real life that one ends up having sex with someone he or she does not *love* but is simply attracted to. Artsybashev in 1907 Russia thinks it does happen, and his portrayal of masculine sexual energy is not nearly as pathologizing as Naiman takes it to be.

Kirsanova herself expresses her ambivalent feelings about the prospect of having sex with Sanin again the following day: "'It doesn't matter, doesn't matter . . .,' she kept telling herself, while [her] *secret corporeal curiosity* (*тайное телесное любопытство*)[20] sort of wanted to know *what else* this person, so remote and close, so hostile and so powerful, could do to her" (*Санин* 307. Italics added). Naiman might interpret this fragment as an affirmation of Sanin's power over a weak and passive woman, but it reads like evidence of Artsybashev trying to give the woman a voice and

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disputes the latter's claim that no woman in Russia of the period "would adopt [the novel's] professed ideology." Quite the opposite, Boele argues that *Sanin* was almost "required reading particularly among girls and young women." He admits that Naiman's criticism may be plausible "from a modern point of view," but shows that Naiman ignores the fact that the Artsybashev novel was extremely popular with female readers (Boele 126–127).

[19] According to Nicholas Luker, "despite its sexual aggressiveness, the novel curiously imposes its own scale of sexual values: while exalting the purity of natural desire, it condemns male sexual conquest for domination's sake" (*Sanin: A Novel* 265).

[20] If Artsybashev happened to know Sologub's *The Petty Demon* (1902) well enough, Kirsanova's *тайное телесное любопытство* may be seen in contradistinction to Peredonov's *блудливое любопытство* / "lecherous curiosity" discussed below (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 112).

agency of her own (she has corporeal curiosity, after all!), something that is often denied to women in a lot of Russian literature of the period.

Lida, Sanin's sister, is a well-read, intelligent woman who succumbs to having sex with Zarudin but she is far from being voiceless and her philosophy of what Nivat would call "libertinage" is also well-articulated in the novel:

> A number of books she read, a number of great and free ideas have gone through her brain, and she saw that [her sexual intercourse with Zarudin] was not only natural but also good. It did nothing evil to anybody, while giving pleasure (*наслаждение*) to her and to the other person. And without this pleasure she wouldn't have had any youth, and her life would have been as dismal as a tree in autumn when all the leaves have fallen down. The thought of religion not having consecrated her union with the man was ludicrous to her . . . (*Санин* 174–175)

Lida realizes nonetheless that in a man's world the more pleasure she gives to "a man and herself . . . the more she will be despised by men." Svarozhich's sister, Lyalya, is also given a voice of her own: she laments the world of "double standards," in which men's sexual prowess is considered "almost heroic," while women are always protecting their reputation and have to resist all temptation. Contrary to Naiman's assertion that all males in the novel are misogynists (*Sex in Public* 49–51), Sanin may or may not be one, but Svarozhich is definitely not; he agrees with his sister and goes on to claim that this double standard is one of the chief "injustices in the world": "One can ask any man if he will marry a cocotte . . . and each of them will say no. But why is any man better than a cocotte? She sells herself for money, while he indulges in debauchery and always in the most filthy, perverse form (*распущенно развратничает и всегда в самой гнусной, извращенной форме*)" (*Санин* 111).

These views are very liberal and progressive for Russia: they echo contemporaneous suffragist / emancipationist debates in Western countries. Being a failure artistically / esthetically, Artsybashev's "boulevard novel" nevertheless quite aptly represents the heteroglossia of debates about gender roles and pleasurable sexuality in its epoch. It does try to indoctrinate the reader (as all didactic books do) but does not preach misogyny and gender inequality. Rather, *Sanin* is a pioneering attempt to depathologize carnal desires in general and fiction about eroticism in particular in a hostile environment of Russian fear and suspiciousness of sexuality. Just like Kuzmin's *Wings, Sanin* belongs to the anti-utopian counter-tradition in Russian writing arguing for the prevalence of individual's intimate life over social causes and concerns.

My treatment of *Sanin* in many ways follows Laura Engelstein's apt analysis of its importance as the first attempt to create a non-patriarchal and anti-misogynistic celebration of pleasurable sexuality (her analysis echoes Luker's afterword to the translation of *Sanin* quoted above):

> Despite its vaunted hedonism . . . the book imposes its own scale of sexual values. While exalting the purity of natural desire, Artsybashev condemns sexual conquest for the sake of domination, along with language and actions degrading to women. Indeed . . . *the novel could more convincingly be read as a brief for women's sexual emancipation and equal social standing than as a vindication of the unimpeded sexual appetite of men*. (*The Keys to Happiness* 385. Italics added)

Sanin was perhaps the first Russian novel, in which "physical" eroticism was preferred to "spiritual" one (of "baring one's soul" kind). Viktor Yerofeyev thinks this may have accounted for the huge scandal the novel caused in Russian society when it was published:

> In the Russian tradition the idea of beauty is inextricable from chastity. Preference has always been given to spiritual, "platonic" love in contrast to sensuality, fleshly, physical passion. The latter has often been debunked, discredited, and parodied. I am not even mentioning the philosophy of *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Eroticism has been moved beyond the realm of literature but even there, outside of it, it is rather ironic than erotic (Barkov, [Pushkin's] *Gavriiliada*, Lermontov's "cadet poems"). With this kind of tradition in the background, no wonder the moderately voluptuous (*умеренно сладострастный*) *Sanin* could cause a scandal. («На грани разрыва», web source)

As Luker argues convincingly, "central to Artsybashev's portrayal is the primeval vigor of the earth and its life-giving sunlight." Sanin's name, he claims, "apparently derives from the Latin *sanus* ("healthy")" (*Sanin: a Novel* 264).

Incorrigible Ambivalence of Eros and Thanatos: Leonid Andreyev and Fyodor Sologub

Numerous authors and thinkers that emerged during the Russian Silver Age were fascinated with the idea of a relationship between love and death, Eros and Thanatos, sensualism and violent destruction. However, they interpreted it in different ways; one strategy was best represented by Rozanov who treated, for example, Gogol's hypothetical necrophilia—his fascination with dead young women—in a matter-of-fact fashion, without

seeing anything metaphysical or mystical about it. Others, for example, the poet and philosopher Vyacheslav Ivanov, chose to develop Nietzsche's and possibly early Freud's ideas quite radically and came up with an equation of the temptation of sex and the temptation of death. For Ivanov in his 1909 manifesto "By the Stars" / «По звездам», the price a man pays for possessing a woman sexually is death. A blending of the urge to live sexually with the urge to die were proclaimed to be the essence of Dionysus; love was supposed to lead directly to death. These ideas were espoused earlier by Vladimir Solovyov and his followers; Ivanov was in many ways one of those (*Содом и Психея* 239).[21]

At the same time, V. Ivanov was very sensitive to the peculiar character of "Russian Eros"—so evasive, so difficult to pin down and depict with words. From his 1911 verse collection *Cor Ardens* Kon quotes the following memorable lines (addressed, perhaps, to Russian Eros him / herself):

За тобой хожу и ворожу я,	I am walking after you and telling fortunes
От тебя таясь и убегая;	While hiding from you and evading you;
Неотвратно на тебя гляжу я,—	Irresistibly am I gazing at you—
Опускаю взоры, настигая…	But drop my eyes as I come closer…
	(quoted in Kon «Русский Эрос», web source)

Aleksandr Etkind argues that there is a significant difference between the understanding of Eros and Thanatos in late Freud (e.g., "Beyond the Pleasure Principle") and in the Russian context. True, Freud studied Dostoevsky throughout his career, while Nietzsche, a crucial predecessor, may have been influenced by the poet Lermontov, but neither thinker had any deep knowledge of Russian literary and intellectual history. Freud found it very hard, for instance, to understand the essays of his Jewish-Russian disciple Sabina Spielrein because she was "abnormally ambivalent" and he was not too fond of her "destructive drives."[22] For Freud, Eros and Thanatos

[21] An excellent exploration of V. Ivanov's aesthetics and biography is Michael Wachtel's essay "Viacheslav Ivanov: From Aesthetic Theory to Biographical Practice" (Paperno 151–166).

[22] Spielrein was one of Freud's closest disciples; she was also Jung's patient and lover. Her life trajectory is very interesting as she decided to return to the Soviet Union in 1923 and was shot by the Nazis in Rostov in 1941 with all her family. For Etkind, this is a confirmation of Freudian ideas about "death drive," but it is very debatable that one can make this sort of far-reaching conclusions based on the life of one idiosyncratic person. However, it is in the context of this biography that Etkind talks about the "programming

were two competing, co-existent entities that couldn't fuse together and become one force. For many Russian thinkers, on the contrary, the "death drive," or the destructive instinct, and erotic desire were the two sides of the same coin and could not possibly be separated (*Содом и Психея* 239). Etkind concludes that

> the idea of the unity of love and death was characteristic of Russian culture at the turn of the century. This idea was implemented in various forms in the anti-sexual prose of Tolstoy, wherein love invariably leads to death; in late articles of Solovyov; in necrophilic stories of Sologub; in Dionysian lyrics of Ivanov; in Leonid Andreyev's dramas; in Berdyaev's philosophy; and, finally, in Bakhtin's carnivalesque dreams (*Содом и Психея* 328–9).

One can agree or disagree with Etkind's psychoanalytical arguments, and his schemes raise some objections. For example, it is not quite clear why Bakhtin's ideas about carnival lie necessarily in the same line of succession as Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*. In any event, it is very important for my purposes that Andreyev and Sologub are on his list; indeed, these two authors are quite emblematic of a difficult transition from the "old school" Russian critical realism of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Turgenev toward the literature of Russian modernity one would see in such later works as Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*, Evgenii Zamyatin's *We*, Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur*, etc. These transitional texts combine elements of utopianism and anti-utopianism (including dystopia, in Zamyatin's case), anti-sexual grotesque and modernist attempts to generate less restrained and repressed discourses of the corporeal and the erotic.

Andreyev's Lustful Boys

Leonid Andreyev's plays will not be touched upon here: just two of his most significant and scandalous short stories, «Бездна» / "The Abyss" and «В тумане» / "In the Fog" (both 1902). Although he has been credited as a founding father of Russian expressionism, much of Andreyev's work today seems both too melodramatic and obsolete but—just as is the case with Artsybashev's—it is a rather important page in the history of the Silver Age in that it reflects many of the debates about eroticism and carnality

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influence of Russian literature," which is a useful observation if stripped of its Freudian overtones (*Содом и Психея* 329–30).

triggered by, first and foremost, Tolstoy's publication of *The Kreutzer Sonata, Father Sergius*, and other works of his late, "extremist," period.

As a matter of fact, Tolstoy was very indignant with "The Abyss" when it first appeared in print. He told the journalist Muskablit: "This is horrifying! What a dirt, what a dirt! (*Какая грязь, какая грязь!*) How can a youth who was in love with a girl, having found her in such a [helpless] situation and himself beaten badly—how could he go for such a foul thing (*гнусность*)! What a shame! (*Фуй!*) Why is such stuff written at all? For what?" (*Бездна.* Комментарии, web source). Andreyev responded to Tolstoy by publishing a lengthy letter signed by a student named Nemovetsky—the story's protagonist—in which the latter justifies his acts. At about the same time Andreyev wrote to the critic Izmailov:

> You have certainly read Tolstoy berating me for 'The Abyss'? He really shouldn't have: "THE ABYSS" IS *THE KREUTZER SONATA*'S OWN DAUGHTER, ALBEIT ON THE SIDE (*родная дочь его "Крейцеровой сонаты," хоть и побочная*) . . . I have had a lot of beatings for "The Abyss"—but I like it a lot. What can I do? It has one precious quality: straightforwardness. That's why I was afraid to publish it for a while but now I feel sorry I can't publish it 100 more times." (*Бездна.* Комментарии. Emphasis added.)

Why did Andreyev—albeit ironically—link his story so directly to Tolstoy's late work?

In "The Abyss" the 22-year-old Nemovetsky walks with Zinochka, his 17-year-old girlfriend (with whom he has not yet had intercourse, perhaps due to his timidity and her innocence), through the forest; they get lost and encounter three escaped criminals; the thugs beat him up and gang-rape the girl; when he comes to his senses, he finds her naked and unconscious and instead of trying to get help, he suddenly lusts after Zinochka's body and wants to have sex with her. It is not clear from the text whether Nemovetsky actually does rape her or not but he definitely lusts for her body and thus falls into a metaphoric moral "abyss" («Бездна», web source).

It appears that Andreyev's message to his readers is that humans are animals (especially men), and to steep in sex means to steep in animal-like behavior; in this regard Nemovetsky the "imaginary" rapist is equated with the three thugs—the "real" rapists. This behavior is what Russians sometimes refer to as *животный инстинкт* / "animal instinct." Andreyev's vision indeed echoes Pozdnyshev's philosophy in *The Kreutzer Sonata* but, curiously enough, also contains a step forward from Tolstoy's glum vision: Andreyev seems to have implicitly recognized the firm grip sexuality has upon a person and his inability to suppress it, something that Tolstoy

misunderstood or underestimated.[23] It is therefore clear what the former meant when he called his story *The Kreutzer Sonata*'s "daughter on the side." And yet the reproach most critics threw at the writer when the story was released seems absolutely valid: if the "The Abyss" purports to be a story about "normal" sexuality, if Nemovetsky did not suffer from a serious "paraphilia" or psychiatric disease but was an "average guy," an absolutely normal person as Andreyev claimed he was, the story is simply too grotesque to be noteworthy. It is simply yet another testimony of all the hysteria and "moral panic" surrounding sex and the body in the Russian cultural context of the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. It is unclear what one can write about it apart from noting its superficial "épatage" and melodramatics.[24]

Nevertheless, when we reassess this melodramatic story today in the light of Rozanov's heated debate with the likes of Vladimir Solovyov and Leo Tolstoy, in which Rozanov's conservative position must have seemed almost liberal (so bizarre the views of his opponents are from a today's perspective), an intellectual historian of the period can make use of Andreyev's work as an indication of enormous tension, strain and frustration around sex taking place at the time. Indeed, if we apply Vyacheslav Ivanov's above-quoted thesis about the price of death a man has to pay for sex with a woman, it follows that if one chooses to have sex with an unconscious or dead woman, he may actually get away with it. This perspective is a volatile, explosive mixture of fascination with the power of sex and hatred, demonization of it. It is precisely this lack of clarity in distinguishing death from love, violence from sex, Thanatos from Eros that Freud would have called the characteristically Russian "ambivalence" and found so disturbing.

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[23] Rozanov recalled that whenever he would speak to Tolstoy about problems of marriage and sexuality, he was stunned by the fact that the great writer "was confused about all that, akin to a little schoolboy who tries to copy something and is not sure [of the difference] between «и», «і» and «й»; in essence, he didn't understand anything in it save the fact that 'one has to abstain.' . . . No analysis, no ability to combine things; not a single *thought*, just exclamations. It was impossible to interact with it; it was something imbécile" (*Опавшие листья* 84).

[24] There is nothing wrong with producing a shocker and with using grotesque creatively. For example, in the US tradition, Flannery O'Connor's short stories often have satirical, almost humorous plots and shocking, extremely violent endings, but her vision is altogether devoid of sentimentalism and sensationalism and is therefore convincing esthetically. This Leonid Andreyev story, on the contrary, simply does not quite hold together in style or content.

Andreyev's other story, "In the Fog," published just a few months after "The Abyss," was praised by many contemporaries, including Anton Chekhov, as a significant "step forward" in comparison to Andreyev's earlier work («В тумане." Комментарии», web source). The story is indeed a praiseworthy attempt to take a new, modern look at such pressing social issues as sex education of the youth, nervous adolescent sexuality, the male teenager's coming out of age, prostitution, venereal diseases, sex-related murder and suicide. Unlike "The Abyss," it is less pretentious and sensationalist and more "Chekhovian" in painting minimalistic but accurate psychological portraits of its characters.[25]

Pavel Rybakov is a 17-year-old high school student and the only son of a well-off insurance salesman, Sergei Andreich. He has had sex with a much older prostitute at least once and contracted a venereal disease, which is still lingering, not fully cured. Pavel is at the same time fascinated and disgusted by women in general, but is infatuated with unapproachable Katya, his younger sister's classmate. He thinks of himself as being depraved and dirty, while Katya is innocent and clean («В тумане», web source). His father is in the habit of giving him long lectures about the harms of depravity and concupiscence ("There is a thing, Pavel, worse than alcoholism, worse than deadly wars, worse than plague and cholera . . . [this is] lust (depravity / *развратт*)," he explains in one of the most memorable scenes of the story) illustrating those with negative examples from the biographies of his own college friends («В тумане», web source).

Sergei Andreich is unaware of Pavel's STD but he does find an obscene drawing his son has made, but neglected to properly discard and tries to approach him with it. When Pavel boldly admits that it was he who has drawn it, the father becomes angry and leaves the house. Pavel also leaves, with suicidal thoughts on his mind. Wandering about the night city, he bumps into a drunk street prostitute, Manechka, who takes him to her place to drink vodka and have sex. They have a spat as the clearly insane Pavel calls her "Katya" all the time[26] and is not generally very "cooperative."

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[25] Reviews of the two Andreyev stories by critics and fellow authors are helpfully summarized by James Woodward book (*Leonid Andreyev* 71–75). Laura Engelstein analyses both stories from a perspective similar to mine, but she is an historian, not a literary scholar, and she is less interested in defining Andreyev's position in the history of Russian literary discourses of sexuality than I am (*The Keys to Happiness* 375).

[26] Andreyev seems to be making an important ironic comment here: a lot of fellow *intelligenty* of his times were known to visit brothels immediately after a date with their official girlfriends (Kon quotes Valerii Bryusov, a famous poet, as an example [«Русский Эрос», web source]). As noted in Chapter 1, these men often had asexual, unconsummated

Manechka slaps him on the face, they start a drunken fight that results in Pavel stabbing her to death with a kitchen knife before killing himself with the same weapon («В тумане», web source).

The story's dark, gloomy atmosphere is enhanced by a typical Petersburg weather—a thick leaden-colored fog has descended upon the city. The fog made people's skin look yellow, almost corpse-like—so is Pavel's complexion, despite the fact that he is described as well-built and good-looking. Of course, one can agree with Igor Kon who thinks these details only enhance the melodramatic effect of the story («Русский эрос», web source), but one should give Andreyev credit for choosing the right tone for this narrative of commingled sex and death.

At least two other things have to be pointed out as strengths of the story. First is the fact that Andreyev is not afraid to showcase a young man from a wealthy family suffering from a venereal disease. In most of the preceding Russian literature readers were often left to make their guesses about these "irrelevant" details. The writer shows that in this "high society" of educated, well-bred, supposedly broad-minded, liberal people that Pavel's family belongs to, there exists no opportunity to communicate one's own sexual predicament. There is no vocabulary for it on the one hand; on the other, this society believes in lust as a crime worse than war and cholera. It prefers to shroud sexuality in silence and discuss it in strictly moralistic, quasi-Christian terms.

Second, via the portrayal of Manechka as a genuine lowlife person who is unable to understand what Pavel is talking about, Andreyev definitely tries to break away from the Dostoevskian tradition of angelic, sentimental prostitutes of the Sonya Marmeladova kind who are out there to provide spiritual guidance and moral support to fallen representatives of the intelligentsia. Manechka, quite the opposite, is prepared to revolt against male bullying: it is quite remarkable that she strikes Pavel first refusing to take abuse; she doesn't want to drink cheap beer her clients buy her; finally, the readers are aware that Pavel was going to have sex with her knowing that she would contract the STD from him. In other words, one can discern here the nascent concerns about gender inequality, traditionally absent from Russian literature but, as also noted in the case of Artsybashev, slowly moving onto the literary scene in the early twentieth century. We will see in the following chapter how this naturalistic but truthful rep-

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relationships with their spouses or partners but had quite a bit of intercourse with prostitutes.

resentation of sex workers was to be picked up and developed—albeit along different lines—by such authors as Kuprin, Bunin, Georgii Ivanov, and Nabokov.

At the same time, "In the Fog" remains in many ways a typical "premodern" text of Russian sexual burlesque and grotesque. "Carnal love" (to use Karlinsky's term again) is presented as a source of misery, decay, destruction, and violent death. The reader never learns what exactly Pavel's affliction is all about; he is not quite convincingly portrayed as a compulsive suicidal or homicidal type either but we are made to believe that his hyper-sexual sensitivities must inevitably result in violence, murder, and self-destruction. To recall Etkind's presentation of Freud's skepticism about his exalted disciples and patients indulged in the Russian literature of the nineteenth century once again (like Pankeyev mentioned in a previous chapter), Pavel may strike a Freudian reader as "too ambivalent" to be rationally understood. While Andreyev deserves credit for drawing his readers' attention to sexual problems of male adolescents, utter lack of sex education, and poor communication between generations of "fathers and sons," sexual love in the story is but a source of disease, shame, depravity, destruction, violence and death, i.e., the forces of Eros and Thanatos are once again inseparable being presented as an amalgam.

It is rather symptomatic that the story was attacked by critics of different persuasions and political allegiances—from the arch-conservative Burenin who accused Andreyev of "erotomania" to the ubiquitous Countess Sofia A. Tolstaya (Tolstoy's spouse) who called it "dirty" and "cheap." Zinaida Gippius thought that Andreyev "derives pleasure from the morbid emotions" of his protagonist («В тумане» Комментарии»; «Русский эрос», web sources). These are, again, examples of frustration caused by these critics' inability to see Andreyev's expressionistic vision as an attempt to break away from the dominant tradition of silencing and / or distorting sex, gender and corporeality in Russian literature. We may call this story unsuccessful in this regard and keep finding faults with it but it is hardly debatable that writers like Leonid Andreyev did pave the way for subsequent less hysterical, more calm and balanced treatments of carnality and eroticism in Russian literature. He is certainly—just like Mikhail Kuzmin and Mikhail Artsybashev—an important voice in what has been termed here the sub-tradition of anti-utopianism. Andreyev's portrayals of neurotic, sensitive boys are characterized by the unprecedented focus on the corporeal, physiological and sexual. We will see how his early stories echo similarly pioneering endeavors of his contemporaries: Aleksandr Kuprin, Ivan Bunin and Fyodor Sologub.

Sologub's Concupiscent Girls

Although a very different writer, usually classified as a symbolist and a decadent, Fyodor Sologub (1863–1927) was sometimes compared to Andreyev (for instance, by such a thoughtful reader as the fellow poet Maximilian Voloshin), as both seemed to grapple with the newly-born fascination with corporeality and sexualities—partly as a result of the unprecedented explosive interaction between common people on the one hand (including, first and foremost, popular sects such as the Skoptsy and Khlysty) and the intelligentsia and upper classes on the other. Although Sologub is best remembered today for his poetry and his *magnum opus*, the novel *Мелкий бес* / *The Petty Demon* (1902), I will start with discussing his two novellas, «Красота» / "Beauty" (1899) and «Царица поцелуев» / "The Tsarina of Kisses" (1921), in both of which these tendencies have been curiously reflected, and then briefly dwell on the novel. I will suggest that Sologub's complex eroticism goes well beyond decadent "erotomania" and "soft pornography" that he was sometimes accused of.[27] It will also be crucial to see in this subchapter, as well as in the subsequent chapter, the ways Sologub takes on human sexualities and "Russian Eros" have been developed by such younger contemporaries as Bunin, G. Ivanov, Kuprin and, finally, Nabokov.

"Beauty" is in many ways a typical decadent story: a wealthy young woman named Yelena, whose mother died when she was a child, is suffering from boredom, loneliness and a mildly narcissistic form of self-indulgence: she likes to get undressed in front of a large mirror and enjoy watching her virginal naked body for hours. Yelena thinks that she is pure and chaste, whereas the surrounding world is dirty and lewd. Her extreme egocentrism tells her that her body is the epitome of world beauty, and she never tires of staring at her nude reflection in the mirror and caressing her exquisite skin. As she watches herself, she dreams of angelic men innocently kissing her and imagines bucolic landscapes where she and other chaste girls engage in quiet dances in the sun (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 507–511).

But all of a sudden this idyll of masturbatory self-admiration gets ruined by a somewhat voyeuristic maid Makrina, a commoner girl, who peeps through the door that Yelena has neglected to lock and sees her

[27] Laura Engelstein provides an extremely informative, detailed account of attacks on Sologub, Kuzmin, Kuprin, Artsybashev and other authors who chose to explore human sexualities—including "deviant" ones (*The Keys to Happiness* 368–379).

mistress naked and admiring herself. Yelena feels insecure and suspects that now all the servants will be making fun of her; she thinks her privacy has been forever violated; her body no longer seems attractive to her. Her thoughts and dreams become "dirty," while her body is now filled with fleshly desires and base instincts. After an extremely annoying, meaningless conversation with a young suitor named Resnitsyn who is simply too dull to appreciate Yelena's refined sense of beauty and sharp intellect, she goes into her bedroom and indulges in solipsistic thoughts about the corrupt world concentrated now—after Makrina's intrusion—inside her body. She thinks that by destroying herself she will punish the malicious world and stabs herself to death with a small dagger (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 511–515).

Yelena's fate is yet another vision of human sexuality as something sordid and morbid. Sologub's novella echoes both of the Andreyev stories discussed above in that it highlights human helplessness in front of sexual desires that are considered destructive and deadly. Yelena's awakening sexuality (indeed, sex, unlike masturbation, is something that happens between two or more people and thus cannot be extremely egocentric by definition) is sullied by the likes of Makrina and Resnitsyn who have little or no sense of "beauty." The only possible outcome is suicide, just as in the case of Pavel Rybnikov. In addition, both Pavel and Yelena are traumatized by their exposure to Manechka and Makrina respectively: both Andreyev and Sologub seem extremely skeptical and disturbed about the emerging dialogue of the educated classes and common people / (*prostoy*) *narod*. Commoners are no longer idealized (like Platon Karatayev in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, for instance) as cherubic and chaste; quite the opposite, following Anton Chekhov's and early Ivan Bunin's demythologizing stories about the peasantry, they have become lascivious, dirty, appalling in their material poverty and spiritual misery. However, these encounters of the intelligentsia / upper classes with common people / peasants are at the same time a source of sexual experience for the former, be it even as painful as in both Andreyev's and Sologub's novellas.

Sexual awakening in both authors seems to lead directly to death. The only way to avoid self-destruction would seem to be abstinence but it doesn't help either Nemovetsky of "The Abyss" or Yelena too much. They are both chaste, and yet while the former discovers his "animal nature," or "basic instinct" in dramatic circumstances, the latter cannot survive her unexpected exposure to the world of lower strata of society.

Yelena's failure of communication with commoners like Makrina and with the likes of the vulgar philistine Resnitsyn eerily reminds one of

Nabokov's Humbert Humbert who is ultimately unable to socialize meaningfully with either Lolita or her mother Charlotte. As will be shown in Chapter 5, his European *noblesse*, however, does not save him from being much of a hypocrite and Philistine himself. Mocking Americans for their vulgarity and false piety throughout the course of the novel, at the end of the day the protagonist / narrator himself turns out to be the ultimate "vulgarian" and hypocrite when he resorts to blackmailing and moralizing in his abusive relationship with Lolita. Yelena and Pavel appear as Humbert's forerunners in this regard: in their solipsistic worldviews there is no room for the "meaningful Other," and they both are doomed to fail, above all, as *sexual* beings.

The other story to be discussed here, "The Tsarina of Kisses," was written in its present version much later, after the October Revolution that Sologub evidently did not welcome at all (an early version of the novella was initially published in 1907). By 1921 the Bolsheviks had already established their own censorship, which meant that Sologub had to come up with complex extensive metaphors and the Aesopian language to express his attitude to the new regime. In the case of this novella, the metaphor was overtly sexual.

Sadistic and masochistic erotic imagery is strewn throughout Sologub's poetry and prose but this novella seems to be curiously devoid of it. Instead, it seems to echo a number of texts, including *The Book of Thousand and One Nights*, Pushkin's tales and Gogol's Ukrainian stories. Mafalda, the novella's protagonist, is a young beautiful wife of an old wealthy merchant named Balthazar. She is bored with her husband and with her monotonous life, and her passionate dream is to become a "tsarina of kisses." One evening she is visited by a phantasmal magician who has a voice of a young man: her secret wish is finally fulfilled. The following day Mafalda takes off her clothes, breaks through the house servants and runs to the street corner where she appeals to all young brave men of the town to come over and enjoy making love to her. At first the newly born tsarina of kisses gives herself to a large number of handsome young men, then to the soldiers who were sent by the authorities to arrest the lustful Mafalda and her numerous lovers. While one soldier enjoys having sex with Mafalda, the others stab each other in a mortal fight for the turn to enjoy her body. The town's elders are in panic and have no idea what needs to be done to stop this spectacle. Finally, they are helped by an accident: a young weaker soldier who lusts after Mafalda as much as anyone but is unable to win his right to possess her in an open fight stealthily crawls through the soldiers' legs toward Mafalda and stabs her to death with his dagger.

Turmoil ensues, and the young man manages to escape from the scene unnoticed. At night he sneaks into Balthazar's house and has sex with the dead Mafalda all night long. At dawn the soldier dies in Mafalda's cold embrace. In lieu of a moral, Sologub advises his female readers to be wary of ubiquitous temptations and treacherous seducers who ruin families and spoil reputations. This is where readers might actually suppose that Sologub is being ironic about the Bolshevik regime and its appeal to the masses, especially to women who have been promised to be liberated from men's yoke (*Царица поцелуев.* 280–289). But I am not interested in sex as a metaphor for something else in this novella: rather, I would like to discuss sex as such.

Sologub's macabre tale in many ways is reminiscent of Pushkin's *The Golden Cockerel* discussed above, but the focus is now on a reincarnation of the Tsarina of Shemakha—Mafalda the Tsarina of Kisses. This is a modernizing twist: just like Molly Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the woman is moved to the forefront with her own sexual energy unleashed. Not unlike, say, Anna Karenina, this woman tries to break away from her unhappy family and be no longer dependent on society as a men's world but instead of just having an extramarital affair, she opts for an altruistic role of a giver who bestows sexual pleasures on the whole male population of the town (*Царица поцелуев.* 280–289). One can read this story as a sarcastic parody of the Bolshevik ideas and policies of gender equality, i.e., liberation of oppressed women, but Sologub also arguably aims to imagine a dystopia, in which all major "paraphilias" of his culture are duly represented: the hypersexual, "nymphomaniacal" young woman echoes Pushkin's tsarina; the impotent but lustful old man Balthazar may be a parody of Dadon in Pushkin but also, perhaps, a modernized version of Tolstoy's Karenin; the weak young soldier with his necrophilia is vaguely reminiscent of Gogol's protagonist in *Viy*, but also of the writer himself; the spectral sorcerer may well be a ghost of someone like Nikolai Stavrogin of *Demons*, this ultimate lady-killer whose touch is always fatal; finally, the narrator's condescending, moralizing tone reminds one of Tolstoy in his late, extremist period: beware of your sexuality, ladies; never set it free or else be ready to face your own death.

Juxtaposing the two stories, "Beauty" and "Tsarina," one takes note of how Sologub's ideas of sexuality (especially female), femininity and corporeality evolved from 1899 through 1907 to 1921. By the end of the Silver

Age, his unhappy, humiliated female character is no longer a loner for whom the only solution is suicide. Declaring your sexuality, making yourself visible to society (both metaphorically and literally: Mafalda has sex with men right in the street in broad daylight) seems now a viable strategy but still, instead of saving the world, in this decadent environment "beauty must die."[28]

And yet, despite a gigantic step forward in portraying gender roles and all the modernizing discussion of sex and eroticism, despite the anti-utopian connotations of both stories, Sologub the storyteller very much remains within the tradition of burlesquing sexuality, of making Eros and Thanatos as indiscreet or "ambivalent" as possible. Indeed, even as insane Mafalda is still very much alive and pleasing the men, we learn that, although her steamy caresses are hot, her body is *cold*, which may suggest that she is symbolically dying or dead already (*Царица поцелуев* 288). Women in Sologub are powerful figures (even in their self-destruction they show a lot of self-control and determination) who are prepared to turn the tables and establish their authority in society, but their only role prescribed by Sologub is the embodiment of carnality and sensuality. It is not clear whether the author could see any other side to women beyond their "libidos" or sex drives. This somewhat myopic vision of women may certainly have been related to Sologub's own masochism: it is quite logical, after all, that heterosexual masochists fantasize about strong and determined but sensuous female partners. Men like Mafalda's last lover and Resnitsyn in "Beauty," on the contrary, are portrayed as physically weak, but lascivious. The young soldier obviously derives pleasure from what has been called "lust murder" and then out-Gogols Gogol himself when he enjoys necrophilic sex with the woman he has killed.[29]

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[28] Incidentally, 1921 was the year when Sologub, whose health had been deteriorating rapidly, and his wife, Anastasia Chebotarevskaya, decided to leave Soviet Russia for France but had to go through a long and humiliating procedure of the Politburo first sanctioning their emigration but then reversing its own decision. By the time the situation was resolved in their favor, Chebotarevskaya suffered a nervous breakdown and threw herself from the Anichkov Bridge in Petrograd. Her body was discovered only six months later: all this time Sologub had hoped she was alive.

[29] For exact definitions of such paraphilias as "lust murder" and "necrophilia," see John Money's *Lovemaps* (Money 265–6). However, it must be emphasized that I am not using all these terms for "sexual disorders" uncritically: rather, they are just convenient tools for demonstrating that with authors like Sologub (and Andreyev, Georgii Ivanov, Bunin, etc.) Russian literature has made an attempt to embrace the whole spectrum of pleasurable sexuality, both "normal" and "deviant."

Love's Bittersweet Mystery in The Petty Demon

According to Viktor Yerofeyev, Sologub's *The Petty Demon* (written in 1899–1902, published in one volume in 1907) is in a "tense dialogue with the [Russian] tradition of realism" («На грани разрыва», web source). Indeed, it is hard to single out any other novel from the period (with the obvious exception of Andrei Bely's 1916 *Petersburg*) that was a comparable in scope and depth monumental comment on the whole history of Russian literature—from Pushkin and Gogol to Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Rozanov. This text is so rich in allusions, teasingly provocative and seemingly inexhaustible for interpretation that it continues to tickle critics' imaginations to this day: for instance, in the following chapter I will mention, following Yerofeyev's brief remark (*Лолита* 8), an intriguing parallel between the love affair of the young woman Lyudmila Rutilova (possibly in her mid-twenties but the readers never learn her exact age) and fourteen- or fifteen-year-old schoolboy Sasha Pylnikov in *The Petty Demon* on the one hand and Nabokov's Humbert Humbert and Lolita on the other. I will limit myself to pointing out only the sexual and erotic aspects of Sologub's masterpiece. My task is to show that although in many ways the novel echoes and is built upon the very "ambiguities and ambivalences of Eros and Thanatos" that arguably characterize much of Sologub's (as well as Andreyev's) work, it is a qualitative step forward toward the poetics of Russian modernism to be developed later by such authors as Bely, Zamyatin, G. Ivanov, Bulgakov, Platonov and many others.

The novel's deep immersion into the history of nineteenth century Russian literature has been thoroughly studied.[30] Sologub's text contains a vast number of explicit and implicit allusions to Gogol's *Dead Souls* and *Marriage*, satires of Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, the typical composition patterns of all major Tolstoy's works, Chekhov's story "A Man in a Case," and several of Dostoevsky's novels—most notably, *The Idiot, The Brothers Karamazov* and *Demons*. Most of these allusions have been traced by critics, but for my purposes here it is important to summarize the "Stavrogin connections" of the novel. As I noted in Chapter 2, Dostoevsky went as

[30] See, for instance, the 1986 article "The Gogolian Echoes in Sologub's *The Petty Demon*: Are They Imitative of or Organic to Gogol's *Dead Souls*?" by Harry Snyder for the connections between Gogol and Sologub or Stanley Rabinowitz's "Fedor Sologub and His Nineteenth-Century Russian Antecedents." For some of the most informative biographies of Sologub and histories of the period in English, see Vassar Smith's 1993 dissertation *Fedor Sologub (1863–1927): A Critical Biography* and Avril Pyman's 1994 book *A History of Russian Symbolism*.

far as to present the character's confession in having intercourse with a prepubescent girl in detail, even if it was, as the critic Galkovsky suggests, only a thinly veiled "masturbatory fantasy" that had never happened "in reality." In Sologub, similarly, the detailed description of Lyudmila and Sasha's relationship may seem to serve as a cover for the narrator's (and Sologub's too) homoerotic obsession with young boys. Sometimes the reader may even have a feeling that Lyudmila is superfluous to this narrative as the didactic, moralizing narrator is relishing all the charms of the sexually appealing schoolboy, but, as I will try to show below, this is largely a false feeling: Lyudmila is in fact valuable as an independent, autonomous character too. In any event, in contrast with Dostoevsky's inability (or unwillingness?) to "blab out" more about Stavrogin's eventful sexual experience, Sologub at times becomes really exuberant in convincing his reader of Sasha's infinite attractiveness. Even more importantly, Dostoevsky the realist obviously suffers morally when he has to dwell on his main characters' "perversions" that he sees as dangerous ethical aberrations, while Sologub (along with his narrator) seems to be HAVING FUN describing this illicit affair; for him it is a pleasurable experience of writing about something really hilarious and highly enjoyable. In other words, Sologub is able to see sex not in terms of moral degradation and affection as something totally sexless; quite the opposite, he undertakes a bold attempt to reconcile corporeality and carnality, and de-pathologize the erotic and sexual aspects of relationships between the sexes. The plot line of Lyudmila and Sasha is a pioneering narrative of a love affair that appears to be fully devoid of the narrator's guilt, shame, evasiveness, incoherence, and utter lack of expression skills that had characterized almost all preceding ones, with the possible exceptions of Pushkin's and Leskov's.

The portrayal of Peredonov's twisted sexuality and corporeality is also extremely interesting, and not only in terms of social satire of yet another Chekhovian "man in a case." On the one hand, just like the narrator, he derives a lot of homoerotic sadistic pleasure from watching young boys being flogged. On the other, even before he finds himself in the firm grip of insanity, Peredonov's pathological vision of corporeality and utter disrespect for personal hygiene echo Julian the Apostate's pride of his unkempt beard and repulsive appearance:

"What kind of perfume have you put on yourself, Pylnikov?" Peredonov asked [of Sasha as he was teaching a class]. "Soiled yourself with patchouli, I presume?"[31]

The boys started laughing. Sasha felt offended, blushed and kept silent . . .

Peredonov did not appreciate any genuine desire to be likable, not to be repulsive. Any demonstration of such desire, even from a boy, he considered as a pursuit for his attention. If someone has dressed up, that means he is scheming to entice Peredonov. Otherwise, what's the point of dressing up? Neatness and cleanliness were offensive to Peredonov, perfumes seemed stinking to him (*нарядность и чистота были для Передонова противны, духи казались ему зловонны*); to any perfume he preferred the odor of a manured field (*запах унавоженного поля*), which was, in his judgment, useful for one's health. Dressing up, grooming yourself, washing—all these things required time and work, and thinking of work gave Peredonov melancholy and fear. It would be so nice not to do anything, just east, drink and sleep—and that's it! (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 231)

Sologub thus paints a very depressing psychological portrait of the quintessential Russian man: not only he is disgusted by the need to take care of his body, but he also does his best to shield himself from the sexual energy of others. For Peredonov, sex is not only a matter of repulsion and shame but a hazard, a danger, a threat one needs to be wary of.

But as Peredonov gradually loses his sanity (if he was sane at the very beginning, which is an open question), he "blabs out" yet more interesting scoffing observations of the Russian Symbolist obsession with esotericism and mythologization of femininity through the so-called Sophiology. Peredonov has got it into his head that the old Princess from Petersburg who has ostensibly promised to secure his promotion to the coveted position of a regional school inspector is secretly in love with him. With the following exquisite touch Sologub manages to fuse the mockery of his own fellow Symbolists and / or disciples of Vladimir Solovyov with a black-humorous reference to necrophilia:

Peredonov started to realize what the Princess really wants: she wants him to love her again. He found her repulsive, this decrepit one. "She is one hundred and fifty, mind you," he was thinking viciously. "Yes, she is old," he kept thinking, "and YET SO VERY POWERFUL." And his repulsion was mixed with enticement. STILL SOMEWHAT WARM, REEKS OF A LITTLE CORPSE (*чуть тепленькая, трупцем попахивает*)—Peredonov imagined, and

[31] Here Peredonov comes up with the awful untranslatable pun "pachkuli" (*pachkat'* in Russian means *to soil*).

> HIS HEART STOPPED BEATING OUT OF WILD VOLUPTUOUSNESS (*от дикого сладострастия*).[32]
>
> "Maybe if I come together with her again, she will have mercy. Shall I write her a letter?"
>
> And this time he didn't think twice and instantly composed a letter to the Princess. He wrote:
>
> "I LOVE YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE COLD AND FAR AWAY. Varvara sweats, she is too hot to sleep with; she steams like a stove. I want to have a lover cold and remote. Come here and satisfy the requirements." (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 220. Emphasis added.)

In this wild fantasy, the Princess is favorably contrasted to Varvara, Peredonov's second cousin and young wife, who embodies the ordinary, "earthly" (as opposed to the "heavenly" Princess) woman in the novel. Her appearance is quite a travesty though: her body is described as smooth, youthful and very attractive, but her face is "decrepit," alcoholic and lustful. It is as if the body of a "tender nymph would be attached to the head of an aging whore," the narrator informs us and then goes on to lament the degradation of beauty "in our century." We also know that Peredonov and Varvara are an ideal match as their sado-masochistic, badly "vandalized" love-maps (to use John Money's terms again) seem to significantly overlap: "Peredonov got used to Varvara. He was drawn to her: maybe due to a pleasant habit of abusing her (*вследствие приятной для него привычки издеваться над нею*). There was no way he could find another one like that, even if he tried very hard" (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 60).

In other words, despite Varvara and Peredonov's mutual abuse, their relationship is a very happy one: Varvara likes Peredonov to the extent that she is the last one in the whole town to be convinced that he has gone insane (she finally understands that only when Peredonov murders Volodin at the very end). She even seems to perversely enjoy it when her partner spits into her face: "it was as though [the spit] freshened her up (*словно плевок освежил ее*)," the narrator cynically remarks (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 37).

Nevertheless, just as with sexual portraits of Dostoevsky's or Chekhov's characters, Sologub's Varvara and Peredonov are not quite portraits; they

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[32] Peredonov is definitely not a necrophile: as he is losing his mind, his thoughts become increasingly delirious. We do know from the narrator, however, that he doesn't recognize the existence of any relationship between human beings and nature; he denies any "Dionysian, elemental delights" one finds in nature. It is not surprising then that he could be metaphorically attracted to the old Princess who is associated with "culture" rather than "nature."

are caricatures. There is simply too much grotesque in the way most characters and their sexual lives are presented in *The Petty Demon*. In the case of Peredonov, as some critics believe, none other than Vasilii Rozanov could have been his prototype.

This argument was made in Rozanov's lifetime and was certainly meant as an insult to the thinker by his ideological foes. However, even today some scholars choose to pursue the claim that Rozanov was a prototype for Peredonov. In his 2006 essay "Rozanov as a Literary Type," Aleksandr Danilevsky calls Peredonov a "vicious caricature of Rozanov" and provides a lot of what seems to be "firm evidence." He quotes, among other things, a memoir of one of Rozanov's students in a Smolensk region gymnasium (where Rozanov taught geography in the 1880s) who points to his teacher's idiosyncratic behavior; juxtaposes Peredonov's lust for the old Princess with Rozanov's troublesome relationship with his first wife, Apollinaria Suslova (Dostoevsky's *femme fatale*); compares Volodin to Rozanov's best friend Ternavsky who—what a meaningful coincidence!—had curly hair, etc.

Danilevsky adds that Rozanov himself was ostensibly fond of comparing his appearance to literary characters, such as Bashmachkin of Gogol's "Overcoat" or Shatov of Dostoevsky's *Demons* (once he even asked Gippius if he could sign his articles with a pseudonym Elizaveta Sladkaya—an obvious ironic reference to Elizaveta Smerdyashchaya / "*The Stinking One*," Smerdyakov's mother from *The Karamazovs* [«Задумчивый Странник»]). Finally, Danilevsky reminds us that Rozanov's second wife's name was Varvara—just like Peredonov's. In other words, what may have been a rather unscrupulous, *ad hominem* joke in Rozanov's lifetime is thus transformed into a scholarly truth (Danilevsky, web source). Two considerations are left out of Danilevsky's argumentation, however.

First, Russian intellectuals are known to enjoy scoffing at each other using grotesque literary characters as mocking insults. This is part of the phenomena called *glumleniye* and *sŝtiob* referred to in *Chapters 1* and *2*. One only needs to open a Vladimir Lenin volume at random to come across myriads of personal jabs at his political opponents through this "literary name-calling." Therefore, there is no need to take these "humorous" attacks too seriously.

Second, we don't know much about Sologub's attitude to Rozanov, but he clearly, as Gippius recalls, didn't like him very much and once publicly called him "coarse" or "gross": «Я нахожу, что Вы грубы» («Задумчивый Странник», web source). Neither did Bely and many other prominent

Symbolists and Decadents like Rozanov too much. But it should be borne in mind that Sologub got to know Rozanov well personally after the novel had been completed (1902). Unfortunately, Danilevsky does not support his argument with a time frame.

Unlike Rozanov, Sologub worked as a provincial schoolteacher only for several years and obviously acquired a lot of stereotypes about life in Russia's small towns (as only a Petersburger who had to work a few years in a remote province would have). Not only the protagonists but minor characters as well are quite farcical, unless we look at them as some kind of a procession of "sexual deviants" of every stripe. For example, Gudayevskaya, the notary's wife, evidently likes to see her own son flogged and invites the more than willing Peredonov to assist her in this bizarre practice. Marta, a young girl of Polish descent, can only think of marrying Murin, a rude, ill-mannered man in his forties who seems to her an ideal partner, a virile male of infinite "beauty and kindness." Adamenko seems very broad-minded and liberal in her worldview but she derives special, almost erotic pleasure from "punishing" her teenage brother. Sexualities of the other women in the novel are also quite grotesque (Vershina, Grushina, Yershova, etc.)—one is tempted to conclude that this is all caused by whatever stereotypes Sologub may have had about womanhood. But there is one notable exception in this seemingly endless "freak parade": it is Lyudmila Rutilova with her unbridled passion for Sasha Pylnikov.

Some critics believe she is almost a redundant character (Yerofeyev «На грани разрыва», web source), but Sologub purposefully and consistently presents Lyudmila as Peredonov's and Varvara's antipode: she appreciates natural desires, likes to dress up and look sexually appealing in her shorter skirts and laced stockings. To employ Bourdieu's terminology, if this town can be seen as a model "intellectual field" of Russian society, she is a "heretic" in many ways. She calls herself a "pagan" but there is also a hint at her sympathizing with the Khlyst ideology: at one point, Sologub likens the sisters Rutilov's merrymaking (uproarious dancing and singing) to a "rapturous spiritual bath (*неистовое радение*)," which was a distinctly Khlyst term for one of their most common rituals (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 135).

Her infatuation with Sasha is called "love" by the narrator (in the Russian context, *lyubov'* is often seen as a spiritually endowed kinship of souls, by no means a young woman's illicit passion for a teenage boy) but, as Lyudmila herself confides to Sasha, she doesn't believe in the existence of the soul as she "has never seen it with her own eyes" (to question the

existence of the "soul" is quite a blasphemous statement for a Russian, especially a woman: one only needs to recall Dostoevsky's spiritual and soulful prostitute Sonya Marmeladova). Her attraction to Sasha seems purely physical, as her "love-map" is definitely centered around boys in their mid-teens. She is definitely not a "pedophile" but the object of her passion is considerably below the official age of consent. In sum, we learn a great deal about Lyudmila's sexual preferences from the text. First of all, she likes not just Sasha but attractive boys of his age:

> "The best age for boys," Lyudmila was saying, "is 14–15 years old. He still can't do anything and doesn't understand much (*ничего не может и не понимает по-настоящему*) but already anticipates everything (*уж все предчувствует*), literally everything. And then he has no repulsive beard." (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 160)

It is interesting to note that despite all her attraction to Sasha's body, she does not seem keen on consummating their relationship, preferring to indulge in what she calls "innocent caresses" (in today's vocabulary, one would probably refer to it as "petting").

Lyudmila is obsessed with nude adolescent bodies but as she can never see much of those, she enjoys watching teenage boys walk around the streets barefoot:

> She felt an impatient desire to see [Sasha] again but it was a nuisance for her to think that she will see him dressed. How stupid it is that boys don't walk around naked! Or even barefoot, just like those street boys [perhaps homeless or of poor, lower class families—A.L.], whom she liked to watch because they walk barefoot, at times baring their legs up high.
>
> "It is as if it were so shameful to have a body (*Точно стыдно иметь тело*)," Lyudmila thought, "that even boys hide it from view." (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 136)

The last insight is extremely important for understanding the novel: it proves Yerofeyev and others wrong when they underestimate Lyudmila dismissing her as a supporting, secondary character. Without her hedonism (she sometimes seems almost as hedonistic as Fyodor Karamazov in Dostoevsky!) and her love of male body (albeit of puberty age) and almost an entire absence of grotesqueries in the way Sologub presents her to the reader, the novel would have been quite a different book: more of a Gogolian anatomy (Menippean satire) of Russian educated classes' lifestyles. But *The Petty Demon* is just a little broader and ambitious than just that—and largely thanks to the introduction of Lyudmila and Sasha.

The latter character, schoolboy Pylnikov, is also extremely important. One can safely suppose that never before in Russian letters one would have dared to portray an adolescent, a boy of fourteen or fifteen, as a sexual being: not a victim of sexual abuse but a person who has his first love affair with a considerably older young woman and actually enjoys it. Just like Lyudmila, Sasha is not a caricature of any sorts; his persona is given thoughtfully and with a lot of authorial sympathy. One could, perhaps, argue that he is androgynous, bi-sexual or even strictly homosexual, but I do not see much textual evidence to support this claim. Sasha likes Lyudmila, and she is female, which makes him heterosexual in the first place. Additionally, the facts that he is dressed up as a geisha for the town's masquerade or that Peredonov and his "circle" (Grushina, Volodin, Varvara, etc.) spread around the rumor (what Sologub has called Peredonov's *lecherous curiosity / блудливое любопытство* may indeed be dubbed his morbid "pornographic imagination" in today's feminist jargon) that he is a disguised girl do not imply that he IS actually a girl of any kind (*Мелкий бес, рассказы* 112). In his somewhat nervous adolescent sexual behavior, typical of many boys of his age, there is nothing to point toward his homosexuality or androgyny either.

More importantly, Sasha seems to have his own conscious goals in pursuing the relationship with Lyudmila, but the narrator always remains dubious about his corporal and carnal desires, emphasizing his innocence / virginity and bashfulness. Sologub also constantly (albeit obliquely) reminds his reader that Lyudmila is a very young woman, focusing on her tender skin, youthful voice, and so forth: the two lovers may have been only six or seven years apart, and Sologub is conscious that this small age difference—along with the fact that Lyudmila the older partner is a woman—will help his couple get away with their less than chaste kisses, caresses and light petting sessions, that is, would not provoke his Russian readers as a pairing of an older man and adolescent girl would have.

Aleksei Remizov recalls in his memoir about Vasilii Rozanov that at one evening meeting in Remizov's house the thinker remarked: "During the minute of copulation . . . Beast turns into Man . . .—How about Man [when he is copulating]? Into an angel? Or, would you say [someone inquired] . . .—*Man* [*turns into*] *God* [Rozanov responded]" (Remizov 230; emphasis added). It is quite amusing to note that among the guests that night Fyodor Sologub is listed. The meeting took place on October 1, 1905, just three years after *The Petty Demon* was finished. A lot of ink has been spilled over documenting Sologub and Rozanov's mutual antipathy, but

let us compare the Rozanov adage with the following quote from the Solobub novel:

> Lyudmila was hastily kissing Sasha's arms from the shoulders to the fingers, and Sasha, plunged into a passionate and cruel reverie, did not attempt to remove them—. Lyudmila's kisses were infused with the warmth of adoration, *as if her burning lips were kissing not a boy, but a god-youth* in some thrilling and mysterious ritual of the blossoming Flesh. (*The Petty Demon* 235; emphasis added)

One can argue, therefore, that, whatever personal antipathy they felt to each other, both authors were on the same wavelength regarding pleasurable sexuality: both clearly saw their task in depathologizing sexual desire, liberating it from trademark Russian reticence and / or scoffing, and, in the case of Sologub's novel, presenting both partners as possessing agency of his or her own, not reducing the relationship to a victim v. perpetrator model, so familiar to Russian readers from Dostoevsky.

What the readers do learn from the text is that Sasha, just like Lyudmila, has sadomasochistic dreams and desires whenever he is making out with his friend. However, these desires do not imply that either of them is a compulsive masochist or a sadist; Sologub's narrator is careful to assure us that it is just one of the many sexual fantasies the two secret lovers have. Again, the authorial unwillingness to pathologize this mutually affectionate relationship is unprecedented in Russian writing: for instance, Leo Tolstoy, as noted in Chapter 2, did portray a very "healthy" Russian family through Levin and Kitty but their relationship was represented as totally sexless, devoid of any carnal desires; it is not quite clear how Kitty could get pregnant in this ideal family.

The Petty Demon stands from a today's perspective as a pioneering Russian modernist novel that combines certain traits of the classic realistic tradition in its reticence, evasiveness and burlesque in representing carnality and eroticism with a breakthrough sympathetic portrayal of an illicit love affair between a teenage boy and a very young woman in her twenties. As will be shown in the following chapter, after Sologub's novel was published, it was no longer feasible for a littérateur to deny or silence the existence of sex for pleasure and shy away from depicting sexual "perversions" and "deviances." *Peredonov*, or *peredonovschina*, became a byword for being a sexual hypocrite: lascivious and depraved in thoughts and urges but at the same time committed to seeing the carnal and the corporeal as an incorrigible aberration. The way Sasha and

Lyudmila's relationship impacted subsequent literary endeavors will be touched upon in the next chapter.

If a Freudian (or Freud himself) had had a chance to read *The Petty Demon*, he or she would probably not have failed to notice that the notorious, unmistakably Russian "ambivalence" of central characters and indistinguishability between Eros and Thanatos—so characteristic of Sologub's other works such as the short stories discussed above—are much less conspicuous in this novel. Everything has suddenly become much more straightforward; Peredonov personifies the forces of destruction and death ("Thanatos"), while Lyudmila clearly embodies pleasurable sexuality ("Eros"). There is a distinct dividing line between these two characters as the author is no longer in two minds about where his sympathies belong. The last thing Sologub would think of was obviously allowing these two ideologies to merge as Dostoevsky did when he created the protagonist of *Demons*: the "big" demon Stavrogin may have been able to sneak into the story "The Tsarina of Kisses" in the form of Mafalda's ghost-like vicious tempter, but the "petty demon" Peredonov is really a travesty of Stavrogin, and there is simply no place for Stavrogin's ghosts, avatars, or look-alikes in *The Petty Demon*. In this regard, Sologub's novel is truly a bold attempt to modernize Russian literature through eschewing its age-old lumping together of sex and death.

In this chapter I tried to focus on the works that made sexualities and eroticism central to their denunciation of Russian utopian thinking in its inextricable link to pathologizing sex for pleasure. We saw that Pushkin's proto-modern tale *Golden Cockerel* (1834) laid the foundation for a counter-tradition, in which, quite remarkably, anti-utopianism invariably went hand in hand with relatively open-minded discussions of sex and corporeality. One can even argue that, in juxtaposition to "major Russian literature," a "minor," alternative Russian literature was thus born and has been evolving up to nowadays—and not so much in *dialogue* with the "great" major tradition but, rather, quite independently, according to its own immanent sensitivities and evaluations of Russian socio-cultural realities.

This alternative tradition reached its apogee in the Silver Age—in thinkers and authors as different as Vasilii Rozanov, Fyodor Sologub, Leonid Andreyev and Mikhail Kuzmin, who not only produced literary works that signaled the advent of a Russian version of modernity but also gave impetus to both lines of Russian literature in the twentieth century—the Soviet and émigré ones. The most successful attempts at generating dis-

courses of sex and the body by authors who left the country in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution (from Kuprin and Bunin to Georgii Ivanov and Nabokov) were built upon their reflections on these earlier modern texts. I hope to show, in this monograph and elsewhere, the way different motifs of Sologub's *The Petty Demon* influenced such dissimilar novelists of the twentieth century as Vladimir Nabokov and Yuri Mamleyev.

I have also attempted to shed light upon the futility of applying the term "pornography" to literary works: it is emblematic that the first analysis of its meaning (or lack of meaning) for literary studies belongs to Vladislav Khodasevich, a major Silver Age poet. In the following chapters several more authors who were labeled "pornographers" for their being unafraid to focus on the sexualities of their characters will be discussed, from Aleksandr Kuprin through Vladimir Nabokov to Joseph Brodsky.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPLORING THE IMPETUS OF THE SILVER AGE: THE EVOLUTION OF DISCOURSES OF CARNALITY AND EROTICISM IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND IN ÉMIGRÉ WRITING

In the previous chapter I have discussed Russian erotic prose of the turn of the century in its multiple connections to what I have called, following Aleksandr Etkind, the anti-utopian counter-tradition of Russian literature. I have singled out such authors as Leonid Andreyev, Mikhail Kuzmin and Fyodor Sologub, whose groundbreaking works laid the foundation for the literary experiments of both their contemporaries and subsequent generations of literati. They undoubtedly influenced both Soviet literature (which is largely beyond the scope of this monograph)[1] and émigré literature.

My focus in this chapter will be on such pre-revolutionary and émigré authors as Aleksandr Kuprin, Ivan Bunin, and Georgii Ivanov, as they, together with Vladimir Nabokov, who I will treat in the next chapter, appear to have made the most significant contributions to developing the erotic and carnal discourses that emerged in the Silver Age as part of the general search for new discourses of sexuality for a modern Russian society. A common denominator for all these writers is that they engaged in a productive dialogue with Vasilii Rozanov's revolutionary philosophy of sexualities: far from concurring with him on everything, they nonetheless were certainly inspired by and/or echoed his insights and intuitions.

My skipping over the Soviet era is intentional, as I am interested in Russian traditions in the hands of Russian intellectuals. Given that it was the authors who left the country between 1917–1925 who largely created Russian literature in exile, one can safely suppose that they were more

[1] I realize that I have thus sidelined a lot of fascinating literary phenomena, in which the eroticized, sexual body figures prominently, such as the oeuvres of Babel, Bulgakov, Platonov and Zamyatin but, as I pointed out above, early Soviet literature existed in a different ideological framework and was marked by imposed censorship, and Silver Age sensitivities were in many intricate ways transformed into and/or merged with the Soviet ideology (including issues of censorship and repression) in the Soviet Russia of the 1920s and 30s. With émigré and "dissident" authors—from Ivanov and Nabokov to Mamleyev and Brodsky—this task appears much more straightforward: they did not have to adjust their creative philosophies in any way to the stifling conditions of the communist regime.

heavily influenced by the Silver Age, rather than by parallel developments in early Soviet literature. In fact, any of older generation exile literati to be discussed here (e.g., Aleksandr Kuprin and Ivan Bunin) actually wrote some of their best work in Russia *during* the Silver Age and are representative of this period as much as Vyacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely or Osip Mandelshtam. Writers of a younger generation like Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977) and Georgii Ivanov (1894–1958) produced their best work in emigration, but they had absorbed the intellectual achievements of their numerous predecessors who were active during the three astounding decades in Russian history (1890–1920).

I will argue in the next chapter that Nabokov's *Lolita* (if treated as a Russian, not an American, novel; both approaches are plausible) is a crowning achievement of Russian strategies for representing carnality and eroticism in post-Silver Age writing, but its success would not have been possible without Nabokov's precursors, whose work he knew quite well, regardless of whether he praised or berated (or both) the given authors in his numerous interviews and critical essays. The specific works discussed in this and previous chapters that, as I will claim, may have directly impacted certain poetic and thematic aspects of *Lolita* as a novel about sex and eroticism include Fyodor Sologub's *The Petty Demon*, Vladislav Khodasevich's "About Pornography," G. Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom*, Kuprin's *Sulamith*, and Bunin's short stories.

Finally, the authors of later generations—Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996), Yuri Mamleyev (b. 1931), Viktor Yerofeyev (1947), Vladimir Sorokin (1955) and others who lived considerable periods of their lives in the Soviet Union—have arguably been avid readers of and active respondents to the Silver Age legacies: such a literary benchmark as Mamleyev's best novel *Шатуны* / *Vagrants* (1968, first published in 1988), for instance, appears in many ways to have "leapfrogged" the Soviet tradition and inherited directly from Sologub, Bely, Kuprin and many other Silver Age authors and thinkers (in addition to Gogol, Leskov and Dostoevsky, of course). All these authors, while grappling with representations of the body and sexualities in their works, have contributed to the anti-utopian sub-tradition of Russian literature—to this day a most topical tendency in literature and the arts as after a brief spell of liberal democracy in the 1990s, Russia continues to be an authoritarian state, in which, for example, the utopian heritage of the *pochvennichestvo* (a nationalistic philosophy of the "soil" generated by Fyodor and Mikhail Dostoevsky, Nikolai Danilevsky, Apollon Grigoriev and many others) is very much alive and thriving. As noted in the previous chapters, philosophical and literary discourses of

utopianism and imperialism (such as "Eurasianism") continue to side with anti-sex, anti-erotic and anti-corporeal ideologies, whereas most writers of anti-utopian creed tend to come to terms with eroticism and carnality in their work.

It can be argued, however, that the only author of these generations who had intended to create erotic texts and succeeded in doing so was the poet Brodsky (discussed below in *Chapter 6*). The others (Mamleyev, Yerofeyev, Sorokin, etc.) have been mostly interested in anatomizing sex-related problems of Russian/Soviet culture and society. They all have been quite successful in producing what I have called grotesque burlesques of sexualities, a tradition dating back to Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoevsky (as revealed in such characters as Bashmachkin or Fyodor Karamazov) discussed in the previous chapters, but also recurring in the first half of the 20th century in such authors as Sologub, Artsybashev and Bunin. Their best work, from Mamleyev's *Vagrants* and Yerofeyev's novella *Жизнь с идиотом* / *Life with an Idiot* and novel *Русская красавица* / *The Russian Beauty* (1982) to Sorokin's social satires of Putin's Russia in *День опричника* / *Oprichnik's Day* (2006) and *Сахарный Кремль* / *The Sugar Kremlin* (2008), is replete with oftentimes bizarre sexual and erotic imagery, but the intent of each author was fundamentally anti-corporeal and anti-carnal: the overall objective was to mock and parody sexual practices of their contemporaries in a scornful, scoffing fashion rather than attempt to "poeticize" those.[2] In any event, these novelists are also of interest to a student of sexual and erotic discourses in literature as they were in many ways directly influenced by the poetics of sex and the body that emerged in the Silver Age and was later developed in Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom*, Bunin's *Dark Alleys*, Nabokov's late oeuvre (mainly *Lolita*), etc.

[2] As a result of this approach, a number of extremely important "postmodern" Russian texts, such as Sorokin's *Норма* / *The Norm* or Yerofeyev's *Жизнь с Идиотом* / *Life with an Idiot*, are often labeled "pornographic" by many readers and critics but this label may really mean something totally different in these cases: the texts in question may simply have too many sexual grotesqueries and too much crude sex-related humor to be taken more seriously by the public. In other words, it is partly the writers' own fault that their best work is thus misinterpreted and underestimated. Nabokov and Brodsky are examples of writers of a different creed: each tried to produce a *positively charged* poetic of sexuality, in stark contrast to the "negative poetics" of Mamleyev, Sorokin, or Yerofeyev.

This assessment does not aim to argue that *глумление* and *стёб* are the only levels at which sex scenes in, say, Sorokin's *Oprichnik's Day* can be understood. For example, the group anal sex scene of the oprichniks in the bathhouse (the "caterpillar") is most certainly a mocking allusion to the well-known Khlysts' collective sex rituals during *радение* and are thus parodies of collectivist mentality.

I intend to explore the contemporary authors Mamleyev, Sorokin and others elsewhere.

I will start my analysis with two pre-revolutionary novels by Kuprin—*Суламифь* / *Sulamith: A Prose Poem of Antiquity* (1908) and *Яма* / *The Pit* (1915)—exploring their connections to Vasilii Rozanov and possible previously underestimated ways, in which the former author could have influenced sexual and erotic themes in subsequent Russian letters. Although these works were written during the Silver Age, it will be seen that they could be discussed alongside more modern, post-Silver Age projects of Ivanov and Nabokov.

Before I turn to Kuprin, I would like to briefly comment on the term *erotic writing*. I think one can call a literary work "erotic" only when it is focused on sex and eroticism *and* in it human sexuality is not travestied but portrayed with authorial sympathy. The problem is, however, that the terms "erotic novel" or "erotic fiction" are becoming increasingly debased in Slavic studies. Just like the aforementioned meaningless word combination "literary pornography" has often been a way of referring to some of the most accomplished works of fiction, the label "erotic fiction" is oftentimes used to denote any work that contains scenes of sexual intercourse, regardless of how they are presented. This can be quite confusing and misleading.

For example, Aleksandr Etkind in a recent article on contemporary Russian literature calls Vladimir Sorokin's *Тридцатая любовь Марины* / *Marina's Thirtieth Love* (1984, first published 1995) an "erotic novel" ("Stories of the Undead" 653). Here is an excerpt from the first scene of the book, in which Marina, a 30-year-old music teacher, has sex with one of her boyfriends Valentin, a 52-year-old pianist:

> "A-a-a-a-a," Valentin froze for a moment and then moaned bending the knees of his pillar-like legs.
>
> Marina had hardly managed to squeeze one of the ostrich egg-like balls (*одно из страусиных яиц*) of his enormous shrinking scrotum that was turning violet when his thick sperm pushed its way into her mouth.
>
> Squeezing his penis rhythmically, Marina clung to its head with her lips, greedily swallowing the arriving tasty liquid (*жадно глотая прибывающую вкусную жидкость*). (*Тридцатая любовь Марины* 7)

This satiric novel is an anatomy, or Menippean satire, of late Soviet life, just like many of Sorokin's novels of the 1980s, including *Norma* and *Ochered'*. But, as seen from this fragment, it is certainly *anti-erotic*: sexuality is represented in grotesque burlesques aimed at shocking the writer's "samizdat" readers (in the 1980s) and also as a reaction to the extreme

sterility and sexophobia of Soviet literature and culture. This reaction can be described as *stiob* (of which the Gogolian and Dostoevskian *glumleniye* was a predecessor), one of the most popular intellectual attitudes of many Russian intellectuals to their environment from the early 1980s to this day. For Etkind, in any event, the absurd grotesqueries of representing sex in this novel (such as the woman greedily swallowing the tasty semen) are not noteworthy, which results in a crucial misreading and mislabeling of Sorokin's postmodernist text.

Illicit Love in Aleksandr Kuprin's Sulamith

Kuprin (1870–1938)[3] wrote a lot about sexual love at the turn of the century and is still remembered as a neo-Romantic author of novellas about adventure and adventure-seekers, yet with a sentimental flavor: such works as *The Garnet Bracelet, The Duel*, and *The Witch* (*Olessya*) are widely read in Russia to this day. The short novel *Sulamith* is perhaps not so often referred to but is arguably an interesting phenomenon in the erotic prose of the Silver Age. *The Pit*, to be discussed in the second part of this section, is a serialized novel about the phenomenon of prostitution in Russia. Although these novels may not be representative of the entire Kuprin œuvre (and may not be amongst his crowning achievements), they both explore pleasurable and deviant sexuality in unprecedented ways, quite different, as we will see, from earlier and contemporaneous contributions from Chekhov, Andreyev and even Sologub.

It is not too hard to understand why Kuprin decided to turn to the Old Testament's *Song of Songs* and retell the love-story of King Solomon and a maiden from the town of Shunem (the present Sulam). First, this was a story addressed by his numerous predecessors and contemporaries in Russia and worldwide: from Gavrila Derzhavin's 1808 poem "Solomon and Sulamith" and several poems of Pushkin to the French romantic composer Chabrier's lyric piece "La Sulamite" and Akhmatova's, Balmont's and Voloshin's poems written in the Silver Age. Second, it is the most erotic part of the Bible: a romantic love affair between the king of Israel and a girl of low social standing must have looked like an attractive story to retell at a time when Russian story-telling finally opened itself up to such seemingly artless but sexually charged plots. Indeed, Kuprin's short novel

[3] Kuprin's best-known biography in English is *Alexander Kuprin* by Nicholas Luker (1978).

would have seemed a little too melodramatic take on a trite biblical anecdote, had it not been for one eerie touch, one little nuance that the writer added to it: his Sulamith / Shulamite is just thirteen years old, whereas Solomon who finds the "love of his life" in her is about forty-five.

One could suppose that there exists a direct link between Kuprin's conception of *Sulamith* and the famous lines from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*:

Любви все возрасты покорны;	*All ages are resigned to love*,
Но юным, девственным сердцам	But to youthful, virginal hearts
Ее порывы благотворны,	Its gusts are as beneficial
Как бури вешние полям:	As spring rain-storms to fields:
В дожде страстей они свежеют,	They freshen up in the rain of passions
И обновляются, и зреют—	And get renewed, and ripen
И жизнь могущая дает	While powerful life gives them
И пышный цвет, и сладкий плод.	Both magnificent bloom and sweet fruit.
Но в возраст поздний и бесплодный,	But in *later, more fruitless life*,
На повороте наших лет,	As we enter the middle age,
Печален страсти мертвой след…	*The deathly passion's imprint is sad*…
	(*Евгений Онегин* 201; italics added)

Not only Kuprin tries to breathe new life into Pushkin's oft-quoted lyric—he actually pushes its message a step further, "modernizes" it via polemicizing with the Golden Age poet: young age is extended to include a pubescent girl, while the middle-aged man seems far from experiencing a "deathly passion" or feeling sad about his affection for the girl. They both feel quite happy and elated in the course of their seven-day-long love. However, there is a hint of sadness as well: throughout the narrative, it is emphasized that this is his first, greatest, and "last love" (*Sulamith* 100).[4]

The novel's plot is very simple and somewhat melodramatic: it does not need to be retold here. It is more useful to turn to certain details that—just like in Pushkin's *Golden Cockerel* discussed in the previous chapter—matter quite a bit and may point to Kuprin's more complicated message that definitely transcends the plot's simplicity. King Solomon (perhaps to enhance his allegorical "Russianness," he is actually called a "tsar" in the novel—following the canonical Russian translation of the Bible) is portrayed as not just a very wise, shrewd man but also as a quite healthy, physically strong and extremely good-looking one. Even his famed wisdom

[4] All the translations from the novel are B.G. Guerney's.

often targets glorifying corporeality and sexuality as his witticisms often deal with eroticism and sexual life. One such episode takes place when Solomon "cruelly, hurtfully" makes mock of the Savvian Queen, a passionate lover who is famous for concealing her legs from view, even from her sex partners. A rumor was thus born that the queen had "feet like a goat or webbed ones like a goose's." To expose the queen, Solomon commanded a transparent crystal floor to be built in one of his chambers; the empty space underneath it was filled with water and stocked with live fish. As the woman enters the chamber to meet with Solomon, she doesn't notice the glass and, thinking she has stepped into the water, she raises her skirts and exposes her "ordinary human legs" and reveals them as unshaven: "crooked and grown over with coarse hair." The next morning the well-meaning king sends after her a runner with a bundle of some rare mountain herb—to remove the hair from her body. The very upset Savvian queen, however, beheads the runner and returns his head to Solomon in a "bag of costly purple" (*Sulamith* 109–113). This is of course a jocular anecdote with which Solomon meant to entertain Sulamith, but one can safely suppose that, after Pushkin, no one in Russian literature would dare to incorporate this sort of playful, sexually charged humor into a narrative.

Another episode of this very "non-Russian" celebration of the corporeal occurs in Solomon's wrathful rebuke to castrates: "He that is castrated through ignorance or by force, or through accident or disease, is not abased before God . . . but woe be unto him that doth maim himself with his own hand" (*Sulamith* 130). This is a statement with contemporary reference, one that appears to be at odds with the fascination many Silver Age thinkers and literati had with the Russian sect of *Skoptsy* / castrates and with the anti-corporeal ideology of the *skopchestvo*.

The novel is subtitled a "prose poem of antiquity" and dedicated to the fellow writer Ivan Bunin—quite tellingly, as we will see in the next section, discussing this coeval of Kuprin's. I would argue that for Kuprin, the antique setting and Old Testament plot are just *allegorical ruses* meant to disorient his vigilant censors and therefore manage to avoid their angry edits. Despite Sulamith's tender age of thirteen and her innocence, she is presented from the outset in an extremely sexualized and eroticized way—again, almost unheard of in post-Golden Age Russian writing—and this presentation of her body is contrasted with her age:

> She straightens up quickly and turns her face to the king. A strong wind arises at this second and flutters the light garment upon her, suddenly making

> it cling tightly around her body and between her legs. And the king for an instant . . . sees all of her beneath the raiment, as though naked—tall and graceful, *in the vigorous bloom of thirteen years* (*в сильном расцвете тринадцати лет*); sees her little, round, firm breasts and the elevations of her nipples, from which the cloth spreads out in rays; and the virginal abdomen, round as a basin; and the deep line that divides her legs from the bottom to the top, and there parts in two, toward the rounded hips. (*Sulamith* 39; italics added)

A striking difference between this text and most other erotic prose of the Silver Age (Artsybashev's *Sanin*, Sologub's novellas and *The Petty Demon*, etc.) is this constant attention to the physical aspect of attractiveness and mutual attraction: the text is so replete with sometimes excessively lengthy depictions of beautiful bodies and all kinds of exuberant verbal foreplay of the two lovers complimenting each other that one can suppose Kuprin must have intended his text to incite masturbation fantasies in his most impressionable readers, although much of the novel's flowery language is clearly borrowed from the relevant book in the Bible. In my opinion, the author's intent was more ironic than pornographic: he felt it would be an effective provocative move to saturate his prose with frank erotic descriptions that in Russian literary would usually have been confined to obscene writings a la Ivan Barkov's *Luka Mudishchev* or Afanasiev's *Заветные сказки* / *Secret Tales*.

From the very beginning of their love affair and to the end of Sulamith's life 7 days later, procreative sexuality is not mentioned or implied by Kuprin at all. Solomon and Sulamith's pair bond seems to have been meant only for pleasurable intercourse. In other words, there is no link between sex for pleasure and sex for reproduction in this narrative (unlike, say, the writing of Rozanov, who was ready to recognize pleasurable sexuality, but only as subordinate to procreative acts). Still, there is a strong emphasis on marriage: Sulamith is destined to marry Solomon, and the idea of their marriage is developed throughout the narrative. Why did Kuprin have to insist on the marital character of their relationship: after all, Solomon already has 700 wives and concubines, and Sulamith is a commoner, a "vineyard girl," not an ideal match for the king? Why, once again, is she just thirteen years old in the novel?[5]

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[5] It is also important that in Kuprin's time it was considered to be a universal truth that the age at menarche is significantly lower in hotter climates (now it is usually discarded by many scientists as a highly debatable assumption since a variety of genetic, nutritional and even socio-economic factors are also at work [Zacharias, web resource]). Kuprin's choice

A plausible explanation is that Kuprin consciously echoes Vasilii Rozanov's philosophy of marriage: Kuprin and Rozanov, as we will see in the following section on *The Pit*, knew each other's work fairly well. Rozanov, however, was preoccupied with procreative sexuality and corporeality (finding lactating breasts and pregnant bellies most charming). Likewise, Kuprin must have concurred with Rozanov's famous prescription against masturbation and prostitution in the first "Basket" of his *Fallen Leaves* (as I mentioned in Chapter 2, onanism was heavily pathologized at the time, while prostitution was also seen as not just a socio-psychological sore but also a problem of biological degeneration):

> A survey has shown that roughly from the 6th grade of gymnasium students enter the stage of onanism alternating with prostitution (*в полосу перемежающегося с проституцией онанизма*). One or the other. If not one, then the other. But aren't *both* awful? [It is imperative that] . . . not only marriage between gymnasium students of both sexes should be *allowed* but that it be made *compulsory* (*обязательным*) for 16-year-old boys and 14.5 year-old girls (to make sure their *imaginations* are not spoiled yet) . . . and only upon this condition they should be able to get their graduation certificates. Indeed, "dream" and "romance" could well be placed inside marriage and occur "later on" in wedlock. (*Опавшие листья* 237)

This was written around the same time as Kuprin's novel, which in this Rozanovian light appears to be an illustration of the thinker's radical ideas, but in *Sulamith* the male partner is obviously much older, which makes this love story a precursor to the most famous age-inappropriate relationship in modern literature: that between 36-year-old Humbert and his twelve-year-old stepdaughter in Nabokov's *Lolita*. In any event, the links between Rozanov's belief in a pagan cult of flesh, his rejection of the New Testament as fleshless and sexless, his full embracement of the Old Testament and Kuprin's short novel are conspicuous. In my judgment, they are revealed, first and foremost, in the way Sulamith's eroticized body is presented: the text always mixes her bashfulness and desire to expose her nudity. Her clothes are meant to both conceal and reveal her body. This is arguably an implicit comment upon Rozanov's famous lines

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of ancient Israel as a setting of the novella may have been thus correlated with Sulamith's tender age. And yet it is unlikely that Kuprin made his heroine 13 years old due to this "hot climate factor" or the age of consent in ancient Israel. It is much more plausible that he had other things on his mind.

from an earlier book, *В мире неясного и нерешенного* / *In the World of the Unclear and Undecided*:

> What is sex (*пол*)? What is the sexual (*половое*)?
>
> First of all, a point covered by darkness and horror, beauty and disgust; a point we don't even dare to call by its name (*точка, покрытая темнотой и ужасом; красотой и отвращением; точка, которую мы даже не смеем назвать по имени*) and in special literature use an alien term from Latin—a language that we don't feel keenly.[6] A stunning instinct; the stunning feeling, with which a person is "struck dumb," he/she is not "finding the words," doesn't "dare" to speak (*он «не находит слов», не «смеет» говорить*) as he/she approaches the root of his/her being . . . Our clothing is only a development of sexual covers; there are two astonishing things about clothes: it COVERS—that's its concept—but it also REVEALS, marks down, points out, decorates—and again it does it all to the sexual in us. A tendency to conceal oneself, to flee and the tendency to reveal oneself and conquer are amazingly combined in clothes . . . what we call sexual "shamefulness" (*половой «стыдливостью»*) is a psychological extension of clothing: we shamefully hide in sex (*мы стыдливо затаиваемся в поле*) . . . But equal to this fear of BEING SEEN, open to the other, there exists also a remarkable craving of sex for OPENING UP, attract to and expose itself (*мучительная жажда пола—раскрыться, притянуть к* СЕБЕ, *показать* СЕБЯ). A girl who chastely blushes when someone looks at her would never want to live any longer the very second she would learn that nobody will ever look at her any more before the grave. (*В мире неясного и нерешенного* 21–22)

Rozanov's complex dialectic of sexuality echoes Foucault's rejection of the "repression hypothesis": indeed, as one tries to suppress the sexual, the opposite could result because it will thrive under this prohibitive "cover" as a body under provocative clothes. From the description of Sulamith quoted above, it is clear that Kuprin's narrator could be consciously following Rozanov's dialectic of sexuality.

After seven days of unbridled passionate love, Sulamith is, rather predictably, killed by Eliab, a young lover of Solomon's most influential (and jealous) wife, Queen Astis, as the girl tries to shield her royal lover from the sword of the "young warrior" (*Sulamith* 151). But in contrast to

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[6] Rozanov means that the Russian language uses the word *пол* for 'sex': the latter term is, for him, foreign and alien. Interestingly, the primary meaning of *пол* in Russian is 'half,' a 50% part of something. The idea of incompleteness of sex, its "unfinalizability" (to use a Bakhtin term) may thus be somewhat fatalistically encrypted in the Russian language. This etymological nuance may well be related to the striking shortage of existing linguistic means to express carnality and eroticism meaningfully in Russian culture.

However, this argument is certainly rather speculative as the primary meaning of the word *пол* in Russian is 'floor,' not 'half.'

Sologub's novellas, the violent death of the female protagonist is not presented as a fatalistic outcome of love and sexual passion. Before the murderous scene takes place, the wise Solomon tells Sulamith that she should not fear death as it is all about a natural course of things and that their affection set an example to be repeated by future generations (*Sulamith* 146–7). In other words, this is possibly one of the few complete divorces of sex and death drives, a full erasure of ambivalence between Eros and Thanatos that one can observe in the Russian literature of the Silver Age (akin to what we noted in the previous chapter in Sologub's presentation of the illicit love affair of Lyudmilochka and Sasha in *The Petty Demon* but even more emphatic). Had Sigmund Freud been able to read Kuprin (along with Merezhkovsky whom he did apparently read), he might have altered his opinion of Russian writing.

Kuprin's shorter fiction is not singled out for analysis here, but a brief discussion of his novella «Морская болезнь» / *Seasickness* (1908) is worthwhile. It is one of the few Russian literary works that address the issue of rape in a straightforwardly realist mode, without any moralistic slant or melodramatics. Yet more importantly, the author attempts to represent the painful experience of a violent group rape from a woman's, i.e., a victim's, perspective.[7]

Yelena, a young, recently married member of a revolutionary circle, travels on a steamer between two cities on the Black Sea; a storm comes up, and she gets seasick. She has to lie down, but all the sleeping berths are occupied. The captain's assistant, apparently an ethnic Greek and referred to as a "darkie" by the author, invites the suffering woman to his cabin and later on sexually abuses her, together with a young sea cadet. Yelena tells the story to Sergei, her husband, a fellow social-democrat and a writer. Although Sergei acknowledges that he has "no right to either condemn or forgive" her, he is concerned that, should she become pregnant, the child may suffer from hereditary alcoholism or syphilis. The reader also learns at this point of the narrative that their marriage has never been consummated. Yelena assures Sergei that she has made the incident

[7] It is also crucial that the rape in Kuprin's story remains unreported to law enforcement: to this day, the problem of unreported rape in Russia and other NIS looms large. The victims are either intimidated by the rapists or are afraid of consequences should the "shameful incident" gain publicity. The police/militia are often reluctant to assist the victim, especially in cases of domestic and date rapes. This concealment results in distorted statistics of the rape to murder ratio: while there are about four rapes per one murder in the US, in Russia there is one rape per three murders on average (for specific numbers, see Lalo 188).

up to test his feelings, but in the morning, she abandons her husband, leaving for the same city she just arrived from, obviously to live with the revolutionary commune. In her farewell note to Sergei, she accuses him of being "just like everyone else, petty, mistrustful, humiliatingly jealous" and "acquisitive" in his love for her (*ты оказался . . . собственником в любви*) («Морская болезнь» 109, 123–126).

Nikita Yeliseyev, a contemporary Russian critic, argues that this story "almost hails rape as the only possible form of fleshly, sexual love," while its reader does not feel any compassion for the heroine, but "is shamefully tempted to find himself in the position of the rapist" (Yeliseyev, web source). In other words, if one concurs with the critic, Kuprin's perception of eroticism and sexuality remains similar to what Pavel Rybakov's father in Andreyev's *In the Fog* called "depravity" / *разврат* (discussed in the previous chapter): "What you did is worse than murder," as Yelena exclaims to her rapist («Морская болезнь» 118).

This critic has clearly misunderstood the novella. Kuprin's *Seasickness* is not about sex and eroticism, it is about rape—that is, a violent crime that has nothing to do with sex between consenting partners. The rape scene is not "pornographic" or "erotic" in the least, and the scene is intended to cause the reader's sympathy and pity for Yelena, along with anger at the rapist. It is not sexually stimulating in any sense, unless the reader were to be a sexually violent person him/herself or someone who liked to fantasize about sex-related violence. Kuprin's description of the scene also contains no details whatsoever of the actual violence, which shows that the author's intent lies elsewhere, not with writing an erotic narrative.

Yelena's story is actually a bitter and biting satire of then-fashionable "spiritual" or "celibate" marriages that remained unconsummated (mentioned in Chapter 1 in relation to Blok, Bely and some others). Following Rozanov, Kuprin clearly tries to attack such sexless unions as leading nowhere, showing that human sexuality cannot be disposed with in this fashion. He also attempts to jettison the concept of a progressive "new woman" (that Yelena evidently is) as a non-sexual being whose gender equality with men is achieved at the expense of her sexuality.

I do not know if Kuprin will be considered by most readers as successful in these attempts or not but, in any event, this novella serves my purposes here as a thematic bridge between the erotic fantasies of *Sulamith* and austere naturalism of *The Pit*.

Sexless, Child-Like Prostitutes in The Pit

Kuprin's most scandalous work, a serialized novel *Яма* / *The Pit* (1915), is a relatively lengthy and complex literary work; it is not my objective to discuss all of its motifs and themes, but only some of its chief references to sexuality. I will start with its intertextuality, that is, the conversation Kuprin sets up in the text with his predecessors (most notably, Anton Chekhov and Fyodor Dostoevsky) and contemporaries (first and foremost, Vasilii Rozanov). Then I will move on to Rozanov's critical take on Kuprin's novel and briefly dwell on its sexual and gender-related motifs (such as the representation of female sexuality).[8] Finally, I will try to conclude with some thoughts on how Kuprin's novel transcends the social and cultural problem of prostitution *per se* via positing the prostitute as a central figure of modern city life. Unlike Baudelaire's or Benjamin's Paris, the Russian city Kuprin portrays (to be more exact, his semi-fictional Yamki district is a mixture of seedy districts of the Ukrainian cities of Kiev, Odessa and, possibly, Kharkov) does not feature any *flâneur* figures but instead has the quintessential Russian *muzhik* in the background as the prostitute's male counterpart.

Kuprin's authorial voice in the novel is Platonov, a reporter who, in accordance with intellectual trends of his times, quits his job at a petty newspaper and moves closer to the common people, to the *muzhik*, by taking up all kinds of hard, physical odd jobs. Characteristically, Platonov is presented as unattractive and asexual: he frequents Anna Markovna's brothel in the Yamki and befriends many girls working there (most notably, Zhenya), but his goal is not to have sexual intercourse but rather to observe and produce social commentary based on his observations. Through his commentary we can clearly see what position Kuprin sought for his novel in the history of Russian letters. One of the most interesting exchanges takes place when Platonov is invited to drink and party with a group of young students that includes Vasilii Likhonin who will later figure prominently in the novel. Their drunken conversation quickly turns into a lecture the older man gives to his young buddies. Platonov marvels at the absence of truthful and realistic treatments of prostitution in Russian writing:

[8] See Olga Matich's 1983 article "A Typology of Fallen Women in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature" for a discussion of the theme of prostitution in *The Pit*.

> But our Russian artists of the word—the most conscientious and sincere artists in the whole world—for some reason have up to this time passed over prostitution and the brothel. Why? Really, it is difficult for me to answer that. Perhaps because of squeamishness, perhaps because of pusillanimity, out of fear of being signalized as a pornographic writer (*прослыть порнографическим писателем*); finally, from the apprehension that our gossiping criticism will identify the artistic work of the writer with his personal life and will start rummaging in his dirty linen (*копаться в его грязном белье*). Or perhaps they can find neither the time, nor the self-denial, nor the self-possession to plunge in head first into this life and watch it right up close, without prejudice, without sonorous phrases, without a sheepish pity, in all its monstrous simplicity and every-day activity. (*The Pit* 98–99)

Platonov/Kuprin's indictment against Russian writers' ineptitude in writing about sexuality (in this case, about deviant practices, i.e., prostitution) echoes the sensitivities and sentiments of his numerous contemporaries discussed in the previous chapters who all argued for more open and truthful representations of carnal and erotic discourses in literature: Rozanov, Khodasevich, Andreyev, even Artsybashev.

Indeed, one of the main reasons why, for instance, Rozanov was so heavily demonized in his life-time by his "colleagues" of the literary *beau monde* was that he was not afraid to write about sex and make the philosophy of sexuality central to many of his projects. The reporter goes on to single out Chekhov's 1888 story "An Attack of Nerves" in a beautifully constructed praise of the older author who happened to be Kuprin's close friend, but before he sarcastically—akin to Sologub in *The Petty Demon* in tone—refers to contemporary literary schools, such as Russian Symbolism:

> They [Russian writers] do write [about prostitution]... but it is all either a lie, or theatrical effects for children of tender years, or else a cunning symbolism, comprehensible only to the sages of the future. But life itself no one as yet has touched. One big writer—a man with crystal pure soul and a remarkable talent for delineation—once approached this theme, and then all that could catch the eye of an outsider was reflected in his soul, as in a wondrous mirror. But he could not decide to lie and to frighten people... He passed with his wise exact gaze over the faces of the prostitutes and impressed them on his mind. But that which he did not know he did not dare to write. (*The Pit* 99)[9]

[9] Elsewhere in the text of the novel, there is another direct reference to Chekhov's "An Attack of Nerves." Soloviov, Likhonin's friend, tries to play his role in reforming Liubka the prostitute by reading this story aloud to her, and the narrative unexpectedly produces a

One might dare to disagree with Platonov here: as is evident from his correspondence with Suvorin, Chekhov did know the life of brothels rather well, so his indecision about delving deeper into the problem of prostitution should be explained by other reasons that I tried to look at in *Chapter 2*: for example, by his misogyny.

But Kuprin's observant reporter obviously thinks otherwise:

> This same writer [Chekhov] looked at the *muzhik*... more than once. But he sensed that both the tongue and the turn of mind, as well as the soul of the people, were for him dark and incomprehensible... And he, with an amazing tact, modestly went around the soul of the people, but refracted all his fund of splendid observation through the eyes of the townsfolk... there are two singular realities—ancient as humanity itself: the prostitute and the *muzhik*. And about them we know nothing save some tinsel, gingerbread, debauched[10] depictions in literature. I ask you: what has Russian literature extracted out of all the nightmare of prostitution? Sonechka Marmeladova alone. (*The Pit* 99–100)

This linking together of the prostitute and the *muzhik* is extremely important in the Russian cultural context, although I personally disagree with some of Platonov/Kuprin's conclusions as Chekhov did produce some stunning naturalistic descriptions of village life[11] and, as noted in the previous chapters, did not buy the intelligentsia's myth of the chastity of the common people. And yet Kuprin is right on target here: the Russian prostitute at the turn of the century was most typically of poor peasant background and thus directly related to the *muzhik*, in many ways his female counterpart. However, Platonov sees Sonya Marmeladova of *Crime and Punishment* "underneath the drunken, hideous exterior" of every Russian prostitute: it is difficult for me to share this vision as well. He finally gets "heated" (up to this point he spoke "wearily," "as if unwillingly") and

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"tremendous impression" upon the illiterate girl: "Lord! Where does he take all that stuff from, and so skillfully! Why, it's every bit just the way it is with us!" (*Yama* 281)

[10] The Guerney translation of this word is unfortunately incorrect: in the original we read: «И мы о них ничего не знаем, кроме каких-то сусальных, пряничных, ёрнических изображений в литературе.» The latter adjective is translated as *debauched*, but *ёрнический* really means *clownish, wicked*. This mistranslation is really crucial, as Kuprin here seems to have implicated what I referred to as the burlesquing of sexual themes—a strategy that originates in Gogol and culminates in some of Tolstoy and almost all Dostoevsky.

[11] Maksim Gorky in his famous article "About Russian Peasantry" (1922) points out that Chekhov "led off a new perspective on peasantry with his stories "In the Ravine" and "Muzhiks," offering a more truthful and less idealistic vision of the *muzhik*. This new approach was later taken up by Ivan Bunin" (Gorky, web source).

arrives at a conclusion that Rozanov deemed central to the whole Kuprin novel:

> The fate of a Russian prostitute—oh, what a tragic, piteous, bloody, ludicrous and stupid it is! . . . Why, all of them, whom you [Platonov is addressing his younger male friends—A.L.] take into bedrooms—look upon them, look upon them well,—why they are all children; why, each of them is but eleven years old. Fate has thrust them upon prostitution and since then they live in some sort of a strange, fairy-like, toy existence, without developing, without being enriched by experience, naïve, trusting, capricious, not knowing what they will say and do half an hour later—altogether like children (*с тех пор они живут в какой-то странной, феерической, игрушечной жизни, не развиваясь, не обогащаясь опытом, наивные, доверчивые, капризные, не знающие, что скажут и что сделают через полчаса—совсем как дети*). (*The Pit* 100–101)

This equation of prostitutes with children is really the novel's leitmotif: it ends with another somewhat melodramatic comparison as the narrator echoes the protagonist Platonov lamenting the disintegration of the Yamki brothels into "solitary," street prostitution:

> And all these . . . women—always naïve and foolish, often touching and amusing, in the majority of cases deceived and perverted children (*обманутые и исковерканные дети*),[12]—spread through the big city, were dissolved within it. Out of them was born a new stratum of society . . . strolling, street prostitutes-solitaries. (*The Pit* 406)

It would also be interesting to determine to what extent Kuprin's views on prostitutes as childish and indifferent to sexual intercourse were influenced by his exposure to the ideas of Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso put forward in *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (1893, Russian translation 1902). The book was quite popular in Russia and in Europe at the turn of the century.

Its impact on Russian society is explored in detail by Laura Engelstein in the chapter "Female Sexual Deviance and the Western Medical Model" of her book on sexuality in Russia *The Keys to Happiness* (1992). She points out, among other interesting facts, that Lombroso and Ferrero, his co-author, were "themselves indebted to a Russian physician, Praskovia Tarnovskaia, for much of the material . . . " Tarnovskaia's study of Russian

[12] This is another crucial mistranslation in the Guerney text: the English for *исковерканные* is *ruined*, not *perverted*.

prostitutes was published in Paris in 1889; almost all her findings found its way into the 1893 Lombroso's book (*The Keys to Happiness* 133).[13]

Lombroso thought women have a much lesser physiological need for sex than men: prostitution, for him, "exists, so to speak, totally for the benefit of men, while for women there is no equivalent: they simply have no natural need." It is a phenomenon that proves that "men have greater sexual needs" (*Criminal Woman* 60–61). Lombroso's conclusions really echo the stance of Kuprin's novel: prostitutes—or "female degenerates"—are "less perverse" and less harmful to society than male criminals; prostitution would not exist "without male vice, for which it is a useful, if shameful, outlet";[14] the more women become prostitutes and thus degrade themselves, the more "they are helping society" (*Criminal Woman* 37). Lombroso also thought that prostitutes have a "weak sex drive" and are "sexually frigid." Prostitution "originates not in lust but in moral insanity." The main problem is that these "fallen women" devote themselves to "vice at an age when they are barely physically ready for sexual intercourse" (*Criminal Woman* 213: cf. Kuprin's insistence on prostitutes as "eternal children").

It is this "moral insanity" (or "moral degeneration") that Lombroso blames for the sexual frigidity of prostitutes. He suggests that women with strong sexual drives never become prostitutes but prefer to be adulterers. In his opinion, these women can retain "modesty," whereas prostitutes are completely immodest. Therefore,

> when women, despite their innate sexual coldness, become prostitutes, the determinative cause is not lust but moral insanity. Lacking modesty, indifferent to the infamy of vice, even attracted to all that is forbidden by a taste for the pathological, they give themselves to prostitution because it offers a way to support themselves without working. Sexual coldness is in fact an advantage for them, almost a Darwinian adaptation. For a sexually excitable woman, prostitution would be exhausting. But for prostitutes, coitus is an insignificant act, morally and physically. They sell themselves to men because they get money in return. (*Criminal Woman* 216)

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[13] Interestingly, Engelstein notes that Dr. Tarnovskaia was an aunt of V.D. Nabokov, Vladimir Nabokov's father. The writer was very much aware of his famous ancestor and was appalled at Chekhov's misogynistic treatment of her in one of his 1888 letters (*The Keys to Happiness* 144).

[14] This thought—however shortsighted from a contemporary standpoint—seems to be aptly illustrated with the story of Likhonin's attempt to save Liubka from the brothel that collapses largely due to Likhonin's own hypocrisy and loss of interest.

Of course, from a today's perspective, we are sure to find these views naïve and empirically invalid, but it is intriguing to hypothesize that Kuprin (and Rozanov) could have been digesting the ideas of the Italian founder of criminology.

In any event, Kuprin's likening of a fallen woman to a child is singled out for endorsement by Rozanov in his 1909 review of the initial parts of *Yama*, entitled "Kuprin." In addition, Rozanov praises Kuprin's "main observation"—that of "weak sexuality" or even "sexlessness" of prostitutes:

> What is this ["fallen"] girl like in her nature? Weak-sexed or altogether sexless! (*Слабополая или вовсе бесполая!*) The very "fall" occurred due to a certain indifference to her sexuality—because sex was not perceived by its subject as something large, important, valuable, worth being preserved! "Just something, like anything else in a human being," just like "hands," "legs," and "head" necessary for a craft. Whenever sex is not immanently valuable, a natural "prostitute" is born; just as men who don't have a serious idea of their sexuality are, in essence, male prostitutes (*проституты*), i.e., they do exactly the same thing as these girls. But execution by society for some reason befalls not those who are on top, who are ringleaders of all this, who are buyers but the purchased merchandise that is truly wretched. («Куприн», web resource)

Rozanov concludes that prostitution can be "defeated" only as a social phenomenon, not a personal problem. In other words, although he echoes Kuprin in finding the prostitute child-like, he doesn't see her as a moral aberration, as a product of some sort of degeneration, which would be the dominant Western anthropological / criminological perspective at the time, influenced by Lombroso. He therefore seems to be trying to mollify Kuprin's glum, pessimistic vision of prostitution as a major social sore, by not seeing the prostitute as a degenerate. He is making an analysis of prostitution far apart from more psychological explanations that existed in Western Europe at the time and more in line with a social-constructivist perspective.

Kuprin, however, seems to be a little more skeptical than Rozanov as to any prospects of curing the sore of prostitution. Zhenya/Jennie is portrayed as the most attractive, intelligent and freedom-loving girl in the brothel but her contracting of syphilis and subsequent suicide symbolize the decay and destruction of institutionalized prostitution (brothels) into the chaos of pimps and street hookers. Liubka's unsuccessful reformation at the hands of Likhonin and his friends (it is quite symptomatic that both Rozanov and Kuprin emphasize the destructive role of males, i.e.,

the clientele of brothels, in maintaining prostitution in its most piteous forms—just as Lombroso is quick to point out that it is men who perpetuate prostitution) epitomizes not only the futility of trying to rescue an individual "fallen woman" but also the male hypocrisy involved in such endeavors.[15]

There seems to be another crucial issue on which Rozanov and Kuprin disagree. Kuprin seems to blame male "itch to copulate" for the existence of the problem, along with female passivity and absence of resistance to it. In other words, his take on commercial sex and sex workers is ultimately anti-carnal and anti-corporeal. In the second part («Короб второй») of his *Fallen Leaves* (1915), Rozanov, on the contrary, condemns prostitution in its current state ("Love for sale is really a disgrace . . . that should be erased by sword, artillery and gunpowder.") but realizes that it is very hard to exterminate. He proposes (quite outrageously!) that the state should try to organize prostitution differently and thus "cleanse its depraving, defiling image":

> Once a thought crossed my mind: during a certain part of the evening, from 7 to 9 p.m., all available women (unmarried and not of "moonlight" [Rozanov coined this term to euphemistically denote gays and lesbians—A.L.]) go out to the street and sit on wooden benches, each one in front of her house, dressed modestly—and each with a flower in her hand. Their eyes should be modestly dropped down; they must not sing or say anything. Neither should they call anyone up. A passer-by will stop by the one he liked and will greet her thus: "Hello. I am with you." After this she stands up and, without looking at him, goes inside her house. This evening she will become his wife. Specific days of the week should be allocated for this, during every month throughout the year. Let's call them the "days of the absolved sinner" (*отпущенной грешницы*)—in her honor.
>
> These women will include all those dwellers of a town or a city incapable of a monogamous marriage (*неспособные к единобрачию*) . . . They should not be praised or condemned. They should just exist as a *fact*. They must take good care of themselves [probably R. means their looks and sexual hygiene—A.L.], watch out for their bodily cleanness, as well as have fully calm nerves. They must always be fresh: the ones who take two in one night (nowadays a common thing) should be banished, along with those who take one during their monthly period or on "undesirable days" in

[15] Eric Naiman thinks that through some of Likhonin's statements Kuprin ridicules Solovyov's ideas about the "fifth, highest and androgynous path of love that would unite male with female, spirit with body." He quotes Likhonin's acceptance of this duality as the latter exclaims: "I am not talking about a woman but about a person, not about meat but about a Soul" ("Historectomies" 261–262).

> general (*в дни своего "месячного очищения," и вообще в "непозволенные дни"*). Through this, the raging of prostitution will be halted, while the soul of prostitution[16]—that does in fact *exist*—will emerge to the surface from all the rubbish (*Через это "кабак" проституции устранится, а "душа проституции," которая* есть*, выберется из-под мусора*). It goes without saying that [these women] will bear children . . . They should act as though they were family women but "widowed" every morning and every evening "getting married again." (*Опавшие листья* 433–434)

Today's readers will, of course, be taken aback by some of the wildest products of Rozanov's imagination: his "project" of reforming prostitution is purely speculative and designed for the sake of argument only. What is his argument? The thinker wants to imagine a world in which women are active agents and in which there exist venues for their sexual expression, along with men's. This may have been a new sensitivity about gender equality that I pointed out in the previous chapter talking about Sologub, Andreyev, and Artsybashev. While there was a lot of intellectual cross-pollination going on in the Silver Age, it is hardly questionable that the main source of inspiration for these authors were Rozanov's provocative, often deliberately absurdist ideas and projects.

Kuprin's keen observations of the life of Russian/Ukrainian prostitutes in the early twentieth century, collected in his novel *The Pit* (hailed by Rozanov), are an important development in literary discourses of sexualities and eroticism of the Silver Age. For the first time in Russia's literary history, a full-fledged attempt to imagine and compose a compendium of sex workers' life and subculture was made. Kuprin managed to at least partially depathologize this social group, which had been considered "degenerate," aberrant and incorrigibly wayward before *The Pit*. Kuprin therefore both developed the realistic tradition of representing prostitutes in a literary medium started by Gogol ("Nevsky Prospect"), Dostoevsky (*The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment*), and Chekhov ("An Attack of Nerves") and broke away from it by demythologizing the prostitute as a soulful creature always prepared to become an *intelligent*'s compassionate (bed)mate (as in Dostoevsky) and representing prostitution as a societal sore that has nothing to do with inborn defectiveness or hypersexuality/

[16] Here Rozanov seems to be echoing Kuprin's (or, rather, Platonov the protagonist's) philosophizing about the soul of Sonechka Marmeladova still living in every Russian prostitute (*Yama* 100): although Rozanov found Dostoevsky's portrayal of women in general and prostitutes in particular melodramatic and untruthful, at this moment he appears to be under the spell of the author of *Crime and Punishment*.

"nymphomania."[17] Kuprin's novel thus echoes and creatively elaborates Vasilii Rozanov's philosophy of family, gender and sexualities. Rozanov, in his turn, was able to incorporate Kuprin's insights and intuitions into his own late oeuvre (most notably, *Fallen Leaves*). However, in not allowing his protagonist Platonov to fall in love with Zhenya/Jennie, the female deuteragonist of the novel, in having his Likhonin resist Liubka's charms and try to abstain from having sex with her, Kuprin, in my judgment, reveals his own utopianist vision of "intellectuals of the future" as being ready to tackle social problems of sexuality via talking about them but *not* actually having sexual experience *per se*. In this, Kuprin's novel is also—just like Sologub's or Andreyev's works discussed in the previous chapter—a transitional, not fully modern, text.

Moving the figure of the prostitute to the center of his novel Kuprin shows her importance for the onslaught of modernity. The Silver Age, as was noted in *Chapter 1*, was a unique period in Russia's history when the *muzhik* and the *intelligent* finally appeared to start understanding each other. The prostitute highlighted by Kuprin (most notably, via the characters of Liubka and Zhenya) is a female counterpart of the *muzhik*, and this writer has to be given credit for attempting to enrich the intellectual panorama of Silver Age literature by adding a gender-sensitive dimension to it. In this regard, Kuprin simultaneously follows the poetics of Chekhov's "An Attack of Nerves" and breaks away from its pathologization and marginalization of deviant women.

Bunin's Stories: A War Between the Sexes or Against Sex?

Ivan Bunin is an author whose work has been highly rated and thoroughly studied both in Russia and elsewhere, yet it has scarcely been set into the intertextual context that I have been developing here, despite the Bunin studies industry that focuses on the intricacies of his poetics and his "intertextual" parallels to other authors.[18] However, I will discuss three stories of different periods of his long career—«Легкое дыхание» / "Light

[17] As was a dominant belief at the time. In this, Kuprin clearly does not succumb to Lombroso's influence but it must be said that Lombroso divided prostitutes into two types: "born" and "occasional." All the main female characters of the novel (Jennie, Liubka, etc.) are definitely "occasional" prostitutes, i.e., they are not afflicted with "moral insanity" but, rather, are "temporarily insane" (*Criminal Woman* 222).

[18] See, for example, James Woodward's monograph, *Ivan Bunin: A Study of His Fiction* (1980).

Breathing" (1916), «Дело корнета Елагина» / "The Elagin Case" (1925), and «Чистый понедельник» / "Pure Monday" (1944)—aiming to shed light on the ways sexualities and eroticism are represented in Bunin's œuvre in light of the project I am pursuing here. I am also going to briefly characterize some other stories from Bunin's late collection *Dark Alleys* (that includes "Pure Monday" as a key story). My overall argument is as follows: while there is little doubt that Bunin indeed "keenly appreciated the material world" (Zholkovsky *Text Countertext* 104) and certainly developed a Tolstoyan sensitivity to the corporeal, his ideas about human sexuality remain very much connected to the *pre-modern* discourse traditions that I have been claiming as persisting in Russia, i.e., deeply embedded within the traditions of burlesque and ellipsis of the critical realism of the nineteenth century described in the previous chapters. In other words, Bunin is yet another figure of the Silver Age whose work appears to belong to Gogol's line of succession, as his portrayal of sexual attraction and of female characters reminds one of Gogol's uneasy grotesqueries.[19] Here again, we have a supposedly modern author whose discourse world still relies heavily on traditional discourses of sexuality.

This may sound like a really bold statement: after all, Bunin is often hailed as a champion of depicting love and affection; his late collection, *Темные аллеи* / *Dark Alleys*, has been even accused of excessive erotic explicitness. But a closer reading may reveal that his work is built around anti-sexual and anti-erotic ideologies and strategies, when it comes down to the distinction between what is represented and what is implied.

If one looks at the way sexual attraction and sexual behavior in general are presented in "Light Breathing" (LB) and "The Elagin Affair" (EA), two things become conspicuous: the morbid and labored portrayal of female characters on the one hand and strange similarities (one could even say authorial 'self-repetition' of social types) between major male ones. Both stories produce the impression that the author lacked imagination in representing eroticism and sexuality (we will see that both plots and protagonists resemble each other to a significant degree) and that he clearly struggled to adequately describe women. Some critics may choose to generate fancy euphemisms to deal with these stories and argue that, for instance, both fit into a Buddhist paradigm, but why do first sexual

[19] For instance, in "Elagin" the narrator clearly relishes the "beauty" of Sosnovskaya's dead body, as Elagin has earlier made sure it bears no trace of the violent death. One may think of these details as echoing Gogol's obvious necrophilia (or necromania) in describing dead women.

experience and sexual development of men and women in their late teens (Olia Meshcherskaya, Shenshin in LB) and early to late twenties (the Cossack officer in LB; Elagin and Sosnovskaya in EA) have to be seen in this glum, over-dramatized fashion? Why, as so many times before in Russian writing, does Eros have to be inseparably merged with Thanatos, i.e., sexual intercourse and experience of love and affection lead directly to (self) destruction and death? If these two stories impress readers at least with the drama of *femmes fatales* dying themselves and attempting to cause deaths of their partners, in "Pure Monday" (or "The First Monday in Lent") that drama disappears, as communication between the sexes and sexual relationships are simply travestied and burlesqued. In other words, these stories still allude to the traditional dichotomous discourses about sexuality that I have been tracing, upholding the choices of sexuality as unacceptable or ludicrous.

Alexander Zholkovsky writes at length about the "hybridization of 'sexy' vitality with lifelessness" and the "juxtaposition of episodes bubbling with life and those bringing or symbolizing death" in LB (*Text Counter Text* 103). He also aptly points out Bunin's "reluctance to morally judge his heroine" and the fact that, unlike his mentor Leo Tolstoy, the writer is not afraid to "relish the shallowness" of the girl's emotions (*Text Counter Text* 105). But why do sexual behavior and sex-related emotions have to be necessarily shallow? Julian Connolly, discussing "Pure Monday," praises Bunin's "admiration for the uncommon breadth of the human soul" (Connolly 128). But is it really necessary to consistently equate sexual temptation with decay and death, both spiritual and material? Maybe this recurrent motif implies the writer's rather narrow, limited understanding of human sexuality and—by extension—of the "human soul"?

This equation may seem even stranger if one realizes that in "Light Breathing," the earliest story of all the three, Bunin is recycling the Greek myth about Psyche, famously retold by Apuleius in *Metamorphoses*. In Greek, *psyche* means not just *soul*, but also *breathing*. Lightness, in its turn, implies Psyche/Olia's frivolity, i.e., *light*-mindedness, her sexual changeability: she first flirts capriciously with Shenshin who, as rumor has it, has even attempted suicide, then seduces Maliutin (who is certainly an early prototype—one of many, of course—of Nabokov's Humbert Humbert), and finally breaks the heart of the Cossack officer by lying to him that she is in love with him. Her sexuality is thus portrayed as a character defect, a lack of depth rather than as a serious part of her life. Even after her death, this *femme fatale* continues to be an object of attraction—if we allow for a second (as Bunin may have wanted us to) that the class teacher's keen

interest in her student has really been erotic (in this case, homoerotic). The latter hypothesis may appear far-fetched, but Bunin may have hinted at the fact that some people—both women and men—are in fact in the habit of amusing themselves with seeing their sexual orientation as a continuum (*Избранная проза* 178). In this analysis, sexuality is less managed by social norms, as it would have been in Western literature, than predicating certain (unacceptable) social types.

No wonder, then, that at the text's outset, Bunin describes Olia's reputation using the adjective [*она была*] *ветрена* / [*she was*] *frivolous*. Incidentally, *ветреный* in Russian means *windy*, which can be understood as *being of the same nature as the wind*. Aleksei Losev reminds us that the third meaning of *psyche* in Greek (along with *soul* and *breathing*) is *butterfly* («Психея, Психе» 672). Olia Meshcherskaya is thus a "human butterfly," "light breathing" anthropomorphized.

In making such analogies, Bunin obviously was evolving a strange theory of human appearances that seems to be a curious mixture of social Darwinism, Buddhism, and Lombroso's criminology. Some of these analogies may be intended to be sarcastic or arch, but they recur, in his own characteristic reuse of these foreign references. Most famously, his views on genius evolve in parallel to his representation of the prostitute, as they are expressed in his memoir *Tolstoy's Liberation* (1937), in which he compares Mahomet, Tolstoy, Solomon and Buddha to none other than gorillas:

> Gorillas in their young and mature days are horrifying in their physical strength, limitlessly sensual (*безмерно чувственны*) in their perception of the world, pitiless in satisfying their lust in every possible way (*беспощадны во всяческом насыщении своей похоти*) . . . in their older days though they become irresolute, despondent, mournful, and pitiful. One can actually find numberless saints and greats who are exactly like gorillas even in the way they look! Everyone knows Tolstoy's brow arches, Buddha's gigantic height and a lump on his head, and Mahomet's epileptic fits . . . (*Освобождение Толстого* 68)[20]

Elsewhere in this book, Bunin again ascribes to Tolstoy this rare, "abnormal" type of "high breeding," to which, as he argues, certain commoners /

[20] Tolstoy—just like Bunin—took the idea of being "liberated from flesh" very seriously. This explains the title of Bunin's memoir—*Tolstoy's Liberation*—implying both writers' yearning for some sort of fleshless existence. It is not surprising then that all the three stories under consideration here are ultimately about precisely this: exploring different strategies for liberating oneself from flesh, i.e., from the carnal and the corporeal.

muzhiks and all aristocrats belong. Having the book on Tolstoy in mind, let us recall some of the male characters from the stories in question who are presented as "degenerates" in this Russian variety. In these passages, I believe, the author is engaging in a kind of high intellectual burlesque about a society that has few resources to integrate sexuality into its core as a serious part of modern humanity.

Taking a cue from Lombroso, the Cossack officer who shoots Olia Meshcherskaya at the railway station is described as an "unattractive, plebeian-looking man who had nothing in common whatsoever with the circles to which Olia belonged" (*Избранная проза* 176). The twenty-two-year-old hussar Elagin in the other story is seemingly more complicated; the prosecutor nonetheless argues that he is a typical degenerate and a born criminal / "enemy of society" whose (moral) insanity is not temporary but incurably permanent. The narrator objects to the prosecutor as he mentally observes that, though he was a degenerate, a poorly built and skinny man, Elagin was a good soldier/officer and drank six shots of vodka and other alcohol drinks prior to killing Sosnovskaya but remained *perfectly sober* (*Повести и рассказы* 211). New vocabulary has not done much to redefine old social types.

We learn a lot about Elagin's looks, his drinking prowess and aristocratic pedigree, but does Bunin give him a more modern psychological portrait? I would argue no: all the readers get to know is that, unlike "normal" people, he has had real trouble living through his "first love," first sexual experience. Even though at some point Bunin switches to first-person narration and provides Elagin's statement (testimony) in full, in which he describes the history of his infatuation with Sosnovskaya, by the end of the story one still wonders about its credibility, i.e., could anything of this sort really happen and why did these two partners act in this bizarre, idiosyncratic way? These stories show little sense of sexuality as part of a Western-style subject, integrated with a discernable (even if degenerate) motivational structure, and instead seem to offer newly dressed variants of traditional social types.

The female protagonists of the two stories—Olia Meshcherskaya and Maria Sosnovskaya—have quite a bit in common too: they are both very good-looking, almost infinitely attractive, but in both cases their exquisite looks are destined to lead to self-destruction and death, as those believing in sexuality as evil would expect. It would be probably an overstatement to accuse Bunin of misogyny and fear of women, because those are Western terms, but his imagination definitely appears limited when he faces an arduous task of representing female characters in his fiction. Just

like in many Sologub's stories, the two women are traditional stereotypes: powerful and manipulative, they both use their lovers as tools for implementing their self-destructive urges. Somewhat predictably (if taken as a historical reference), both women were sexually abused as teenagers: Olia was seduced by the fifty-five-year-old Maliutin who took advantage of her flirting with him and deflowered her at the age of about fifteen (*Избранная проза* 176–177); Maria is deflowered by a wealthy Galician landowner who makes her smoke hashish, drink wine and engage in some sort of group sex with his concubines (she is past eighteen at that point, though). Interestingly, both Olia and Maria were evidently attracted to these men; Maria is even described as being "in love" with this "scoundrel" (*Повести и рассказы* 216).

It may seem to a modern Bunin reader that, for this author, there existed some sort of initiation ritual (or maybe an algorithm or a template?), in which very attractive women were to be molested by much older men (handsome but aging) and then go on to abuse young but much less attractive males of the "degenerative type" in their rather obscure quests for (self)destruction. In addition, despite all the age-old popularity of narratives about rivalry between the sexes in many national literatures, can one really buy Bunin's argument that this "rivalry" should necessarily evolve into mutual contempt and antagonistic animosity between women and men? This narrative logic seems perverse from the Western point of view, but it very much parallels the traditional stories of "typical" Russian men and women that we have encountered to this point. There is, then, a possible gap in how these stories are to be read, with Russian readers perhaps taking their morals differently than Western readers might. How these men behave may reflect more the stereotypes about their classes and age, especially because the women seem to participate in the same scripts (and thus express sentiments that Westerners, with their assumption that women are the "angels of the house," find less acceptable).

Sexuality, the first sexual experience in both stories, for both men and women, is in fact presented in very parallel ways: to use a key phrase from "Light Breathing," as "SOMETHING HORRIBLE (*то ужасное*) that is now associated with the name of Olia Meshcherskaya."[21] How can one combine this horror, the narrator asks, with the "PURITY of the look of her eyes" as seen in the medallion photo on the tomb cross (*Избранная проза* 177;

[21] *Uzhasnoe* may well be a reference to Olia's fate in general, not just to her sexual experience. But we also do know that her tragic fate had a lot to do with her sexuality.

emphasis added)? For Bunin, sexual experience is this "something horrible" that happens to some people (male and female alike), something that instantly makes them impure, dirty and doomed for premature death (same is true for Sosnovskaya and her boyfriend Elagin who will be executed for murdering her).[22] Only people who avoid passionate carnal love can live peacefully and for a longer time—this is why Olia's school teacher is called "a not so young maiden" / *немолодая девушка*—a terribly sarcastic expression in Russian, implying that the woman is a celibate old maid (*Избранная проза* 178). In other words, people who have sexual intercourse this way or the other are denied "normalcy" (in Bunin's modified Lombrosian / social-Darwinist understanding of it), intellect and spirituality (they are shallow, to use Zholkovsky's word again), while those who abstain from overt sexual passion (Olia's school teacher, several minor characters in EA) may indulge in different kinds of spiritual pursuits (such as the teacher's eerie cult of "light breathing" associated with the dead Olia, but, as has been hinted, it may actually have been the cult of Psyche, with Olia being just a reincarnation of it). Needless to say, from the perspective of modern psychology, this is a very schematic, unconvincing portrayal of the role sexual attraction and love play in human lives, which is indeed reminiscent of Tolstoy who does not let his Natasha of *War and Peace* have an affair with Andrei, as he is considered unfit and thus unable in principle to redeem the evil of sexual intercourse by creating a healthy family (instead, he inevitably must die). Bunin's approach is certainly a step forward from this position, as the narrator is quick to alert the reader of EA that the Elagin-Sosnovskaya relationship was not about getting married at all (in response to the prosecutor's ludicrous accusation of Elagin not willing to marry his lover), but at the same time he remains faithful to the traditional strategy of pathologizing sex for pleasure—not as guilt, but as straight-line social negation.

"Pure Monday," a key story in the *Dark Alleys* collection, which is often called a masterpiece of erotic fiction in Russia, amplifies the distinction I am making here: it strikes one as being extremely anti-erotic and promoting an anti-sexual ideology, even as it represents sex. The seventy-four-year-old writer who had been living in exile for several decades by then was obviously nostalgic about the pre-Bolshevik Moscow of the early 1910s

[22] According to Thomas Marullo's account of Buddhism in Bunin's poetics, they are "individuals who become hopeless victims of desire and fail to achieve Nirvana" (Marullo 153).

he knew so well. Nonetheless, it is not quite clear why he had to create these two unnamed characters—a male narrator and a female—and an explicitly sexual metaphor to express his nostalgia for uncontaminated, "pure" Russian culture, unless it was to recreate an older discourse logic that had belonged to the era.

The female protagonist appears particularly stilted, to modern eyes. She is a wealthy young woman, obviously a virgin, who combines the over-indulgent lifestyle of an aristocrat with a keen appreciation of things Russian (history, religion, literature) and a decadent habit of frequenting artists' and actors' parties. She is unbelievably well-educated, stunningly brilliant and able to quote large excerpts from literary works verbatim from memory: e.g., from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (*Избранная проза* 531). The woman is invariably on target with her simultaneously biting and analytical, profound observations about everything: from the vulgarity of Chekhov's tombstone to old Russian chronicles (*Избранная проза* 533, 535). This virgin, then, is no naïve, as she would most likely be in a Western novel. Affirming the social logic I have been tracing here, she keeps repeating that the only thing she is not cut out for is marriage and family life. For some opaque reason, she refrains from having sexual intercourse with the narrator. One is led to start suspecting that having and enjoying sex and being intelligent and broad-minded at the same time was as unthinkable for Bunin in his late period as it was when he wrote LB and EA. Enlightenment and being free-thinking about sexuality was not in his narrative vocabulary, as many Western modern texts would sketch.

Sexuality, passion, and social roles are in fact held in very predictable relationships. The male narrator is passionately in love with the woman, but for some reason he is very timid in his attempts to seduce her. Incidentally, just as most main characters in Artsybashev's *Sanin*, both the woman and the man are described as gorgeously beautiful, close to perfection, without a single shortcoming in their respective looks. The story culminates in the woman finally having sex with the man once (that is, losing her virginity to him), and on the following day fleeing Moscow for a remote monastery to take religious vows and become a nun for the rest of her life. Connolly comments on this: "Having enjoyed all the pleasures of the secular world, she decides to spurn life's empty distractions and enter upon a path of renunciation and peace" (Connolly 128). The additional question raised by my reading of the Russian traditions of sexual discourse is this: does having sex only once in one's life imply that the person "has enjoyed all the pleasures of the secular world"? Or, in other

words, why was having sexual intercourse just once a necessary pretext for taking the vows?

There have been, of course, a lot of critical interpretations of the metaphoric meanings of this story but what concerns me here is the fact that the story's direct, non-metaphoric message, or meaning, is rather disturbing in its explicit sexophobia. Having sex (or, rather, *блуд* / *fornication*, as Bunin's heroine puts it) is equivalent to dirtying oneself, but not necessarily in the sense of guilt and culpability: after all, Bunin knew very well that on "pure Monday" Russians would traditionally go to the bath to cleanse their bodies from carnal sins. For the woman, this "pure Monday" bath right after her first and only sexual intercourse with her "first and last" man (*Избранная проза* 530) entails her abandoning the secular world for the rest of her life. She is not atoning, she is finished with that social option, as she thought she would be.

In other words, the Bunin story is not only extremely depressing in its presentation of sexual relationships but also far-fetched and unconvincing in terms of Western ideas about the relationship of sexuality and personality. I am not speaking here of how individuals behave in real life: it is very hard to imagine that anything like that could happen in Moscow at the time or, moreover, *should* have happened. The problem I have with this text is not that of verisimilitude (or lack thereof), but of an adequate portrayal of (discourse for explaining) the life of the upper classes in the period. This story can only be judged successful or sufficiently motivated if the reader participates in the older horizon of expectation about discourses of sexuality—that "taking sex seriously" in that earlier era meant either renouncing it, accepting family life, or death.

In contrast, as we have seen, the last decade of the Silver Age was characterized by the emergence of more modern Russian literary discourses of sexuality and corporeality: I have already discussed Sologub's and Kuprin's contributions to those (among others). In the next section we will see how these tendencies were absorbed and brilliantly elaborated by Georgii Ivanov in his 1938 collection of short prosaic sketches *The Decay of the Atom*. While Bunin was undoubtedly a masterful literary artist, however, I believe that he had not absorbed these changes in narrative arc and stereotypes that would usher in a new discourse horizon: his texts no longer appear to have reflected the realities of his time and place in any meaningful, rewarding way, as newer discourse horizons would have defined those terms. The "chronotope" of this story thus appears to be not the Moscow of the 1910s, but the writer's own memory and imagination

stifled by his treatment of sex as trivial and impure.[23] The horizon of expectation that he imputes to his readers is closer to that of Tolstoy than to his contemporaries in the revolutionary era.

My focus on "Pure Monday" (of all the *Dark Alleys* collection) is not accidental: Bunin valued it very highly and considered it the best story he had ever written (*Собрание сочинений* 395). In some ways, however, it may not be fully representative of the entire collection, and, to do Bunin full justice, a few words about some of the others are in order.

Indeed, many other stories of the collection contain much more explicit sexual scenes and intricate erotic affairs than this one does, but the main question is whether they offer any sexual ideology other than the drab one of "Pure Monday" and the two other stories discussed above? I would argue than they do not, as they all reveal their author's glum, morbid perspective on human sexuality.

Most of the descriptions of naked female bodies in these stories almost invariably point to a male narrator/protagonist's obsession with (and unbridled attraction to) what Bunin probably considered the ideal body for a healthy young woman: heavy thighs (*крупные, тугие, полновесные бедра—Собрание сочинений* 61, 96, 108); sizeable buttocks[24] (*крутые половинки зада, широкая полнота ее зада, лира ее зада, широкий зад—Собрание сочинений* 181, 69); thin, light, shapely, "pure-bred" ankles[25] (*легкие, точеные, тонкие, породистые щиколки—Собрание сочинений*

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[23] One can productively compare Bunin's young woman with a character named Hannibal Lector of the famous US novel and movie *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988). Just as Dr. Lector was both charming, extremely intelligent on the one hand and pure evil on the other, the woman is simultaneously brilliant, beautiful, and "pure virtue" (in Bunin's sense). Both characters seem superhuman, almost supernatural. No one has ever classified Bunin's *Dark Alleys* as "science fiction" or a "thriller" though. I am thankful to Dr. Nikolay Shchitov for this comparison.

[24] While Pushkin's lyrical hero had the obsession with "little feet" (*ножки*) noted above, Bunin's male characters seem to fetishize large buttocks (*широкий зад*). The writer may have borrowed this interest from Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* who famously enjoyed his wife's bottom: "He kissed the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with obscure prolonged melonsmellonous osculation" (Joyce 734–35).

Compare this exuberant description with Bunin's "Zoika and Valeria": "Having blown at it, [Levitsky] greedily kissed several times the tender coolness of the broad fullness of [Zoika's] behind" (*Собрание сочинений* 69). I do not know if Bunin has actually read *Ulysses*, but the correspondence is intriguing.

[25] Bunin's constant scrutiny of slim female ankles as an indicator of robust health and sexual appeal may be explained by his good knowledge of Homer: in Book 5 of *The Odyssey* the author notes the daughter of Cadmus Ino's "fair ankles" (Homer 109). In one of the Russian translations it sounds truly poetic and could catch Bunin's attention: *прекраснолодыжная Ино*.

108, 123) and other important body parts: thin waists, deep navels, "strong" and "sunken" bellies and "bulging" underbellies.

As a parallel, the seemingly hypersexual, erotomaniacal author (in his early to mid seventies when most of the stories were written) never tires of endowing his male characters and narrators with almost satyr-like, insatiable sexual urges, oftentimes aimed at multiple female objects at the same time. But in most of his stories all the attractions and love affairs Bunin presents to his readers instantly become tense and awkward, are for the most part short-lived and in many cases bring about violent premature death (often via suicide or a mortal health problem) of one of the partners. To give just a few examples: the narrator of "Caucasus" shoots himself after an affair with a married woman; Levitsky[26] of "Zoika and Valeria" is unable to choose between the two objects of his erotic interest and rides his bicycle into a moving train; the forty-year-old male character of "In Paris" has sex with a younger woman who moves in with him but he soon dies suddenly on a subway train; fifteen or sixteen-year-old Galya Ganskaya of the eponymous story learns that her lover, a much older artist, is about to leave town for a while and poisons herself;[27] Natalie of one of the collection's best known stories ("Natalie") is jealous of the narrator who has intercourse with his first cousin and marries a man she does not love dying afterwards in premature childbirth (*Собрание сочинений* 15, 72, 97, 103, 140), and so forth.

In some other stories, the death of any main characters is not imminent, but Bunin never fails to provide transparent hints that their sexual union will not last very long and is in fact doomed to fail. The story "Revenge" culminates with the middle-aged partners vowing to love each other and

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[26] Interestingly, this character may have been named after the above-mentioned Chernyshevsky character of the novel *Prologue* who documents in his diary, among other things, Meri's pioneering ideas about female sexual behavior.

[27] "Galya Ganskaya" can be seen as one of the possible sources of Nabokov's *Lolita* discussed in Chapter 5. Nabokov is known to have admired Bunin's prose and poetry. Bunin's artist identifies himself as an out-and-out womanizer who has spent too much time in Paris and read a lot of Maupassant: in Russian usage both clichés imply some sort of satyriasis. Not surprisingly, his interlocutor, a sailor, calls him a "vieux satyre." His intention all along was simply to seduce the young girl and then get rid of her. Galya was thirteen when he first "admired" her and about fifteen when he had a heavy petting session with her but opted against having sexual intercourse ("I felt sorry for her," he explains to the sailor, but the truth probably was that he was afraid to face the consequences of abusing a minor), only to seduce the girl a year later, when she apparently had come of age. Perhaps foreshadowing Humbert Humbert's remorse upon corrupting Lolita in Nabokov, the artist confesses at the end that when Galya committed suicide, he wanted to "shoot himself" and "nearly went crazy" (*Собрание сочинений* 69).

move in together, but as the man kisses his beloved's hand ceremoniously, the reader is led to recall that her homeless alcoholic ex-husband did the same thing after she had given him alms as he was begging near a restaurant (*Собрание сочинений* 185–87).

Rather than crediting Bunin with creating laudatory visions of sexuality and eroticism, a closer reading of the stories may convince his reader that, although this author clearly recognized the power of sexual attraction and did not trivialize the sexual and the erotic, he nonetheless must have been fearful of women, who are responsible for causing this very insurmountable and ultimately (self)destructive sexual attraction. One of the most eloquent statements of this anxiety is arguably a very short story ominously entitled «Начало» / "The Beginning" (1943).

The unnamed narrator announces to unspecified male companions that he is going to share a story of his "falling in love for the first time or, to be exact, losing his innocence / virginity (*потерял невинность*)" when he was twelve years of age. It may sound intriguing, but the attentive readers of *Dark Alleys* cannot help suspecting from the outset that we are going to encounter a speculative concept of virginity and most probably a "spiritual" loss thereof. The schoolboy rides in a train car and enjoys the serene winter landscape outside from the comfort of his seat. All of a sudden this idyll is abruptly terminated, when a young noblewoman enters the compartment, accompanied by her princely husband. The boy is angry at the big bearded man who totally ignores his presence, indifferently smoking a large cigar (one of the several phallic images employed to present the husband). The main trait of the woman that attracts the boy is her "deathly pale" but beautiful looks: we are thus instantly reminded of Gogol's necrophile attraction to dead beauties. She lies down casually and dozes off as she begins exposing first her stockings and then her underwear to the stunned boy. He eagerly observes her perfect skin and, of course, the omnipresent slim ankles and full hips. Her infinite beauty in sleep is another allusion to Gogol's dead women, since sleep clearly symbolizes death. In addition, her supine body is sexually inviting.[28] The boy's masturbatory reverie is finally interrupted by (or climaxes in?) the train's coming to a full stop. He has to get off, and, as he rides home in

[28] The scene may be read as a reverse version of the Bloom—Gerty McDowell chapter in *Ulysses*, in which Bloom, a man in his mid to late thirties, watches teenager Gerty at the beach and masturbates as she consciously exposes herself to him. Bunin would, of course, deny any influence from his contemporary author, especially from a parody of women's novels:

a sledge, his daydreams take him to a pit in his parents' garden where a captured wolf cub is being kept. The pit "wonderfully reeks of a beast" (*Собрание сочинений* 151–54).

What we observe here is, once again, typically for Bunin, a combination of a modernizing twist in style (Freudian phallic symbols; perhaps the overtones of biological determinism) and a profound faithfulness to the pre-modern Russian tradition of the inseparability of sex and death, Eros and Thanatos (noted in the previous chapters). "The Beginning" marks the protagonist's embarking on a lifelong journey that will undoubtedly be filled with frustration, gloom, anguish, disease and death. To lose one's innocence, for Bunin, is not to have sex for the first time but to become engulfed in the irrational and mysterious element of sexuality.

No wonder, then, that in his 1913 "first box" of *Fallen Leaves*, Vasilii Rozanov singles out Bunin, Andreyev and Artsybashev as authors who signify the "great end of [Russian] literature." All literary "Golden Ages," according to him, bring about "deep decay of all life, its apathy, sluggishness, lack of talent." The Silver Age of Russian literature, on the contrary, overlaps in time with the great socio-political and socio-cultural changes, which make literature and "literariness" marginal to the real life of the soul. Rozanov welcomes this decline of "great literature" (from Gogol, Griboyedov, and Pushkin to the likes of Artsybashev and Bunin) as it may indicate the emergence of "great, beautiful and useful life" (*Опавшие листья* 106–107). His evaluation of Bunin, then, parallels my own: that is, in asserting that "the real life of the soul"—the narratives that make sense of individual behavior and guide it—has changed.

In this sense, I also think Rozanov accurately perceived a drop in the "cultural weight" of Russian literature in the first decades of the new century. Bunin's strategy of representing sexualities appears to be an apt example of modernist literary artistry combined with traditional Russian evasiveness and uneasiness about expressing the sexual and the erotic. His fiction, therefore, does not so much reflect the modernizing tendencies of depathologizing sexualities that we observed in Kuzmin, Sologub,

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> Her wellturned ankle displayed its perfect proportions beneath her skirt and just the proper amount and no more of her shapely limbs encased in finespun hose with highspliced heels and wide garter tops…
>
> She leaned back far to look up where the fireworks were and she caught her knee in her hands so as not to fall back looking up and there was no-one to see only him and her when she revealed all her graceful beautifully shaped legs like that, supply soft and delicately rounded, and she seemed to hear the panting of his heart, his hoarse breathing… (Joyce 350, 365)

and Kuprin, and thus probably seemed rather archaic to readers who had been exposed to other discourse logic. Quite the opposite, such stories reveal Bunin's affinity with Gogol, Dostoevsky and Chekhov's distrust and fear of female sexuality resulting in his utter inability to portray women other than as self-destructive *femmes fatales*: in the final analysis, this is who Meshcherskaya, Sosnovskaya and the unnamed "nun" of "Pure Monday" all are. Their male lovers all seem to experience a deep crisis of masculinity given that they are all in love, embarrassed by admitting this love, and prepared to be manipulated by their powerful female partners. This one-sided, predictably gloomy and dull representation of sexual experience, as we will see in the next section, differs drastically from that of the crowning achievements of Bunin's attentive readers/younger contemporaries Ivanov (in *The Decay of the Atom*) and Nabokov of *Lolita*, which will be the topic of this manuscript's Chapter 5. To make clear the transition between what I have been pointing to as Golden Age and Silver Age discourses of sexuality, let me now turn to another response of an author looking back at a great precursor to find his way forward into innovations for a more modern age, yet still distinctively Russian.

Anatomizing Gogol in G. Ivanov's Formative Text of Russian Modernity

In his preface to Ivanov's masterpiece, Aleksandr Shchuplov, the editor of a collection of Silver Age erotic writings, in which this text first appeared in Russia in the early 1990s, proposes the following lines from a 1928 Ivanov poem as a possible epigraph to *The Decay of the Atom*:

По улицам рассеянно мы бродим, На женщин смотрим и в кафе сидим, Но настоящих слов мы не находим, А приблизительных мы больше не хотим.	We wander absently along some streets Staring at women and sitting in cafes But we never find genuine words, While we don't want approximate ones any more. (*Распад атома* 251)[29]

[29] Ivanov's poetry is analyzed, for example, in such essays as Vladimir Markov's "Georgy Ivanov: Nihilist as Light-Bearer" and Irina Agushi's "The Poetry of Georgij Ivanov." His prose, in particular *The Decay of the Atom*, remains much less known and studied in both Russia and English-speaking countries. I hope that this section will help draw more attention to this fascinating text.

What kind of "genuine words" are the poet and his companions, Russian exiles in Paris, short on, and why are the old, "approximate" ones no longer adequate?

In one sense, Ivanov is arguably looking for the words to describe his forced *flânerie*, which he is experiencing as a gap between Russian and Western states of being. On the most literal level, that gap existed: obviously, many Russian émigrés simply could not afford enjoying the life of Paris or Berlin to the full (after all, it is difficult to stroll idly in the downtown area and persuade yourself that you are a *flâneur* when you are hungry and not dressed well enough), so their aimless wandering is in fact absent-minded, almost somnambular, hobo-like. But the words they are looking for as they are gazing at attractive women also need to be "real" or "genuine" in new ways, they see, because there are more shades of relationships between men and women in this Paris, revealing as inadequate the roundabout, opaque and "approximate" ones they previously used for verbalizing sexual attraction and having sexual experience. The text I will discuss below, *The Decay of the Atom*, appears to be a pioneering attempt at developing this new, modern, "genuine" vocabulary for carnal and corporeal desires in terms recognizable to a contemporary Russian audience.

The short poem's final strophe is not quoted by Shchuplov, but I will provide it here:

И что же делать? В Петербург вернуться?	So what's to be done? Return to Petersburg?
Влюбиться? Или Опера взорвать?	Fall in love? Or explode the *Opera*?
Иль просто—лечь в холодную кровать,	Or simply lie down on the cold bed,
Закрыть глаза и больше не проснуться . . .	Close one's eyes and never wake up again . . .
	(«По улицам рассеянно мы бродим . . . », web source)

The poet's situation is truly desperate: to resolve his spiritual stalemate, he considers four equally outrageous options: return to Bolshevik Russia (and probably end up dying in a labor camp); carry out a terrorist attack on Paris's major theater; commit suicide (probably by taking a conscious drug overdose); or fall in love with someone. Clearly, for Ivanov the émigré (although he was married to the young poet Odoevtseva, their relationship was quite tumultuous at the time), falling in love is about as insane and ultimately unthinkable as blowing up the Opera de Paris. Maybe the reason for this utter impossibility of the poet's falling in love is that he

lacks "genuine words" for expressing the kind of love that his Paris experience and situation requires of him. One can speculate that Ivanov thus recognizes that the modern Russian erotic discourse has not yet been generated, in that he cannot conceive of a love that would lead to life rather than death, and so he implicitly sets himself the task to create it. Shchuplov is absolutely right: this poem would make a wonderful preamble to *The Decay of the Atom*, in which a more modernist discourse of the carnal and corporeal is in fact being created by generating new options for poets like Ivanov—love cannot simply lead either to death or family.

When the book was initially published in 1938, *The Decay of the Atom* was predictably attacked by V. Sirin (a.k.a. Vladimir Nabokov) and Vladislav Khodasevich, who had had an ongoing "war of camps" with Ivanov and his colleague Georgii Adamovich. Nabokov was especially upset with Ivanov's "banal descriptions of urinals that can embarrass only the most inexperienced readers" (Nikolyukin 42). As will be seen in the next chapter, it is quite symptomatic that Nabokov picked "urinals" out of so many unsavory images of *The Decay of the Atom* for his denunciation of the book: this author seems to have been really ill-at-ease with all representations of the physiology of human excretions.

Indeed, why didn't Nabokov single out the dead rat afloat in the garbage can or lengthy descriptions of suicides' corpses or multiple rape fantasies of the narrator as examples of "embarrassing" and disgusting elements of the book (*Распад атома* 257, 260, 262)? The answer may well be simple: although he clearly was at ease with explicit depictions of violence and eroticism, this author was rather prudish about representing the corporeal and physiological functions, both in his own work and in the work of others. In his lectures on Joyce's *Ulysses*, for example, he would criticize Joyce for relishing the scenes of Bloom's defecation, arguing those were redundant and unnecessary for the book he called the leading masterpiece of the century (*Lolita Annotated* lii–liii). Nabokov was, therefore, advocating that the lines of the existing discourses be redrawn, but in different terms than those his contemporary was using.

From today's perspective, it is indeed hard to believe that by recurrent references to urinals, Ivanov really wanted to "embarrass" his inexperienced but impressionable readership—shaking up the bourgeoisie had been a tactic of Western literature for forty years at the time. As we will see, however, he clearly wanted to show that for a modern writer there should be no taboo themes and that everything in life—without any limitations –can be expressed via a literary medium: something that had been consistently denied throughout the history of Russian literature as authors

like Gogol, Dostoevsky, or Turgenev felt they had to silence certain things, particularly those pertaining to the corporeal and the carnal. That is, Ivanov is less trying to shock an audience than to take reality into his texts. As we just saw in the example of Ivan Bunin, many of Ivanov's contemporaries could be short of words—and ideas—in representing sexual experience, as well as other facets of a now inevitable modern life.

Roman Gul', perhaps a less subjective critic than Nabokov, praised the book but noted that "aiming to shock [his readers], Ivanov stuffed his book with intentional and coarse pornography, competing in this with Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*" (Nikolyukin 42). Yet that evaluation may be incomplete. As highlighted in the previous chapter, what the critic refers to as "pornography" is in reality something else: namely, the narrator's attempts to verbalize his sexual desires, daydreams, and masturbatory fantasies, which are much less than pornography in the classic Western sense of linking sex, power, and politics (as in the work of the Marquis de Sade). This narrator's sexual emotions (mostly of an imaginary nature) are inseparable from the text of the book as these are played out against Ivanov's overall alienation from the hostile environment of forced emigration—he is confronted with many experiences for which he has no Russian words, but which France seems to discuss.

For example, the text's frequent references to "onanism," that is, solitary sex, are really an extended metaphor for the loneliness and boredom the émigrés are suffering from in their Paris existence. Sex with prostitutes, on the other hand, is a surrogate for all the diverse and rewarding sexual and erotic experience these Russian men used to have access to when they lived in Petersburg. This kind of lifestyle is no longer attainable, and the author is being bitterly nostalgic about it:

> I want the simplest, the commonest things. I want to start crying, I want to be consoled. I want to look at the sky with a nagging hope. I want to write you a long farewell letter, an insulting one, celestial, dirty, the fondest one in the world (*оскорбительное, небесное, грязное, самое нежное в мире*). I want to call you an angel, a stinker (*назвать тебя ангелом, тварью*), wish you happiness and bless you, and also tell you that wherever you are, wherever you find shelter, my blood will always whirl around you in myriads of its unforgiving and never forgiven corpuscles. I want to forget, get some rest, get on a train and go to Russia, drink beer and eat crawfish on a warm evening at a floating café on the Neva. I want to overcome the disgusting sensation of stupor: people don't have faces, words don't have sound, nothing has a meaning (*отвратительное чувство оцепенения: у людей нет лиц, у слов нет звука, ни в чем нет смысла*). I want to break it, no matter

> how. I simply want to catch my breath, to gulp some air. But there is no air whatsoever. (*Распад атома* 259–260)

But there is yet another, deeper meaning of all the explicit sexual imagery of this text: Ivanov is wrestling with the mystery of sex, the irrationality of sexual attraction and the powerful grip it can have on a "respectable" and "presentable" person's behavior and thoughts. All his exuberant, deliberately hideous descriptions of sex-related violence can thus be read as tricks of his literary imagination, used to enhance the force behind his message by way of shock. He tries to make it apparent to his Russian readers that an artist can no longer silence, distort or travesty sexual themes in situations that are now in flux, where earlier they were settled as matters of class expectation. Not to take up sex with new strategies will impoverish his or her work of art and ultimately devalue this sort of sexless, "sterile" writing in the eyes of her/his reading audiences:

> Copulating with a dead girl. The body was very soft, only a little chilly, as after a bathing. With tensity, with a special delight. She was lying there as if asleep. I did no malice to her. Just the opposite, for these several spasmodic minutes the life was still continuing around her, if not for her. The star was growing pale outside the window; the jasmine was withering. The seed had dripped out, and I wiped it off with a handkerchief. I lit a cigarette off the thick wax candle. Missed. Missed (*Мимо. Мимо*). (*Распад атома* 258.)

This necrophilic fantasy may be an implicit allusion to both Gogol and Sologub, as the narrator fancies having sex with a dead teenage girl, whose body is "soft, but a bit cold, just like after a swim" and then is upset about wasting his semen that way. This episode certainly echoes the young soldier having sex with dead Mafalda's body in Sologub's "The Tsarina of Kisses" (1921). Most critically, it moves from burlesque to biting, bitter satire about a pool of narratives about personal experience that seem necrophiliac relics from a by-gone age.

That Ivanov is working within the framework of literary language is here critical to note. Two literary giants of the past who personify these discursive/creative strategies are repeatedly mentioned in the text: Gogol and Tolstoy. This author must again turn back to go forward, to find ways to valorize these great precursors as still valid, while showing that they are functioning in a discourse world that no longer exists.

The Decay of the Atom is replete with explicit and implicit allusions to Nikolai Gogol's life, his oeuvre (*Overcoat*, the Ukrainian stories, etc.) and, most importantly, his legacy. To exemplify how Ivanov uses Gogol to move beyond him, I will focus only on the ones that are interwoven with

the motifs of "masturbating Russian consciousness" and of misogyny, i.e., irrational fear and hatred of women. These passages, I believe, make the case for a conscious negotiation with traditional Russian discourses, as Ivanov figures out a productive way to revalue his world.

Early in the text the narrator declares that sexual love in this book will be presented from a man's point of view, as a woman's one "doesn't exist." Woman, he argues, is just the "body and reflected light":

> Only man's standpoint can exist. There is no such thing as woman's standpoint. Woman, as such, does not exist at all. She is the body and reflected light (*тело и отраженный свет*). (*Распад атома* 254–5)

The text's most extensive and important reference to Gogol begins toward the end of the book as Ivanov, in an almost post-modern fashion, deconstructs and re-writes the novella "Overcoat" (1842) via eroticizing and sexualizing the plot and thereby anatomizing Gogol's creative imagination.[30] In other words, I believe he is consciously trying to adapt Gogol's compelling story for his world. I will now try to show that this complex allusion is really aimed at commenting upon the key differences between the Gogol and Pushkin lines of succession in Russian intellectual and literary history—at allowing Ivanov to diagnose the shortcomings in his own intellectual legacy. Ivanov's take on these ever-bifurcating lines is, I believe, also a conscious development of Vasilii Rozanov's argument in his essays "Pushkin and Gogol" (1891) and "How the Akakii Akakievich Type Has Arisen" (1894).

Ivanov begins his rewriting of Gogol with an apocalyptic reference to "sunsets, thousands of sunsets . . . upon Russia, upon America, upon future, upon perished centuries" (*Распад атома* 271). Sunset for him means global decline, both politically and culturally. On the one hand, he quite

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[30] In other words, Ivanov is much less interested in unveiling some hidden "symbolism" of Gogol's novella than in imagining what the story could have become had Gogol not been an advocate of repressing and silencing the sexual and the erotic.

The sexlessness of the story has been noted by Gogol critics. As Daniel Rancour-Laferrier argues in his psychoanalytical study of *Overcoat*,

> the homosexual/heterosexual opposition is not very helpful at all to understand the psyhcological dynamics of individuals in the story. In an important sense, every one of the characters in the story is sexless. The characters are monstrous automata, not men and women. What matters is not so much their "masculine" or "feminine" identities as the eroticized apparatuses which attach/detach from them, such as overcoats, shoes, eyes, feet, toenails, penises, anuses, feces, children, etc. (*Out from under Gogol's* Overcoat 188)

understandably links his apocalyptic vision to the Bolshevik revolution and to the potentially disastrous outcomes of World War One. The rise of German Nazism and its threat to Europe and the world is not mentioned, but certainly implied. As he is writing this text in 1937, the explicit reference to the Lubyanka (the NKVD headquarters in Moscow) is inevitable: Stalinism is as dangerous as Nazism, neither of which will answer to the persistence of the past in the future. "The Decay of the Atom" (with its implication of developing nuclear weapon technology, as well as to the problem of nuclear half-lives, as consequences thereof) is prophetically related by Ivanov to this overall feeling of impending catastrophe and to the problems that will remain. But the narrator is quick to personalize the experience of this global sunset/decline and demonstrate how it reveals itself at the level of the intimate, the sexual. He sees the cataclysm of the era on a personal level, as he tries to recoup and recast tradition rather than to overthrow it in misplaced revolutionary zeal.

Here is where the contradistinction between Pushkin and Gogol comes into his world. The narrator writes a passage alluding to the poet's death in the duel in 1837: "The injured Pushkin is leaning on his elbow lying in the snow, the red sunset is gushing into his face." This is followed by a harrowing (if not darkly humorous in part) vision of a young soldier (perhaps of the WWI period) masturbating in an outhouse. Then comes the time for Akakii Akakievich Bashmachkin "groping his way" / *пробирается* home from work through dark Petersburg streets (*Распад атома* 271). His "masturbating consciousness" / *онанирующее сознание* is focused on getting a new overcoat, but in Ivanov it is a sexual metaphor: this is his search for a woman. A new woman is bound to deceive him but he is looking for her anyway. His phantasmal search is accompanied by recurring quoting from an 1859 popular love song by Veinberg: "He was a titular counselor, she was a general's daughter." Needless to say, this is what Bashmachkin's rank is in Gogol: the lowest civilian rank in Russia.

Trying to break apart the too-simple equation of social station and sexuality, the narrator goes on to formulate the opposition of two "myths" in Russia's history. Ivanov sees the gap in expressing what such an experience might mean for the individual:

> A bureaucratic myth is being born in the attic—as self-defense from and counterbalance to the icy myth of Pushkin's clarity. [This myth] is sulfuric acid, a secret dream, which will disfigure this clarity, corrode it, corrupt it (*обезобразит, разъест, растлит*). (*Распад атома* 271–2)

Let us now juxtapose it with Rozanov's texts. Even the choice of words is strikingly similar to Ivanov's:

> A many-sided, diverse Pushkin makes up an antithesis to Gogol who moves only in two directions: tense and pointless lyricism going high into the air and irony aimed at everything that lies below . . . There is no tensity [in Pushkin], no morbid imagination or wrong perceptions . . . Gogol knew from the very beginning that he would cancel (*погасит*) Pushkin in people's consciousness and also everything that his poetry brought in . . . Gogol's Petersburg novellas, *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector General* . . . elevate the normal dull life to the limit of vulgarity (*до предела пошлости*). With Gogol our society first began to *lose the sense of reality*, as well as develop the feeling of *repugnance toward it* . . . The cast of his genius has become the cast of our soul and our history. His imagination . . . has *corrupted* (*растлило*) our souls and tore our lives apart filling both with the deepest of sufferings . . . [In *Dead Souls*] we find not the narrowing down but the *maiming* (*искалечение*) of human being as compared to what he is in reality. (*Мысли о литературе* 158–171)

A further, closer juxtaposition of these texts would provide even more evidence that Ivanov probably had used Rozanov's texts in working on *The Decay of the Atom*, or at least shared what might have been a widespread discussion. More importantly, however, Ivanov seems to have been influenced by Rozanov's philosophy of sexuality, as well.

Ivanov's avatar of Bashmachkin is in fact cast in terms quite different from Gogol's original one. He is likened to a "static atom," but if one tried to split it, huge energy ("horrible explosive force") would be released. This energy is precisely the essence of his "secret dreams," i.e., his sexual drive. Following the line from the song, he is lusting after the General's daughter, and she now has a name: *Psyche*.[31] In Gogol's novella, however, she is unnamed and enjoys just a "cameo appearance" in the narrative: all we know about her is that she is sixteen years old and fairly good-looking (*миловидная*)—her nose is pretty but a little "curved" (*Петербургские повести* 107).[32] We also are told by Gogol that she greets her Dad every

[31] One might speculate that this is a hidden reference to Bunin's "Light Breathing" discussed above: we saw that Olia Meshcherskaya in that story is clearly a Psyche as well but I do not think there is enough textual evidence to claim Bunin's direct influence or even any parallels between these works. As I have tried to make clear, Ivanov's approach to representing the sexual and the erotic is quite different from Bunin's: definitely less evasive and elliptical, more modern.

[32] As with most Gogol's texts, "Overcoat" is not really rich in sexual and erotic imagery. All we learn is that the General did have a lover or a "female friend" and that Bashmachkin clearly did not approve of placing pictures of attractive women in shop windows

morning by saying "*bonjour, papa*." These scanty details are sufficient for Ivanov to develop his Bashmachkin's masturbatory fantasy, amplifying Gogol's story to reveal the narrative material tacitly embedded in it:

> Akakii Akakievich . . . leaves the fuss and the surface and descends to the essence of things. His secret dreams surround Psyche's image . . . he slowly slides along the empty sleeping city, sneaks into the apartments of his excellence . . . ghosts his way toward the bedroom of the little angel. He opens the door . . . and sees the "paradise that does not exist even in heavens." He sees her underwear thrown around the chair, her sleepy little face on the pillow, a little bench on which she puts her little foot (*ножку*) every morning in order to pull on her white stocking . . . *Never mind, never mind, silence* . . . (*Ничего, ничего, молчание.*)
>
> He then materializes Psyche in his . . . morbid imagination, makes her come to his attic, lie down on his bed . . . she raises her laced skirt, spreads her naked satin knees. He was a titular counselor; she was a general's daughter. Every time he had met her before he would slavishly bow to her, not daring to raise his eyes from his patched boots. And now, having spread her knees broadly, smiling an innocent smile of a little angel, *she submissively waits for him to enjoy himself with her to the maximum, completely, completely* (*она покорно ждет, чтобы он всласть, вдребезги, вдребезги натешился ей.*) (*Распад атома* 272–3. Italics added)

As in most of (auto)erotic fantasies of the book, this one involves the teenage girl, which may lead one to suppose that the narrator had a strong sexual interest in post-pubescent young women of sixteen to eighteen years old (i.e., that he was an *ephebophile*). That reading of the passage, however, begins to criminalize or at least pathologize what was most often seen in the old days as a social opportunity—operating in the continuing grey zone between a seduction and a rape.

More importantly, this passage reveals that Ivanov understands very well that the only way of modernizing Russian literary discourses of sexuality and eroticism is not to be silent, tongue-tied about them, not to be afraid to verbalize most private, intimate thoughts and dreams.[33] Yet the story's fantasy ends where it has started—with another electrifying opposition of Gogol and Pushkin (he quotes the latter's long poem *Медный всадник* / *Bronze Horseman*):

(*Петербургские повести* 107, 99). But even the scant information the reader is given about female characters appears odd: for example, what is the point of describing the daughter's nose as "pretty but a little curved," which somehow makes her be just *миловидная*, not really beautiful?

[33] In this respect, Ivanov has been influenced by Proust, Joyce and Henry Miller.

> "Stand in your beauty and do not yield," contrary to his foreboding, cheerfully exclaims Pushkin who has scored so many on his Don Juan's list. "*Never mind, never mind, silence,*" Gogol mumbles *having rolled his eyes into emptiness, masturbating under a cold bed-sheet* (*закатив глаза в пустоту, онанируя под холодной простыней.*) (*Распад атома* 273. Italics added)

What Ivanov seems to be saying here—following Rozanov—is that largely all the post-Gogolian Russian literature has had to wrestle with Gogol's silencing, suppressing and distorting human sexualities in his works—with the stories that he didn't tell behind the stories that he did tell. His Rozanovian argument may thus be a clear point about discourse and experience: Russian literature must revive Pushkin's tradition of "light touch" in representing the carnal and the corporeal to extend itself into the present and keep it relevant. After all, that literature offers resources—just not if authors copy simplistically.

Part of the current Russian predicament (a horrifying vision of the Solovki labor camps is one of the final ones in the text)—the Bolshevik rule that Ivanov ascribes to the dominance of "global hideousness" / *мировое уродство*– is that Russian culture has not managed to come to terms with embracing many of its own horrors, not just the sexual and the erotic that had never been raised above the level of an implicit masturbatory fantasy: "Chasing his overcoat, Akakii Akakievich just swept by, with his bird's profile,[34] in canvas underpants soiled by the semen of an onanist (*измазанных семенем онаниста*)" (*Распад атома* 276).[35]

One may, of course, find Ivanov's masturbation metaphor morbid and extreme but, as we saw in Chapter 2, this concept is echoed by contemporary critic Galkovsky who uses similar quasi-sexological terminology to offer his reading of Dostoevsky's major works. Ivanov in exile, therefore, has reached back deeply into Russian traditions to put them into perspective as resources to speak about the present. The result has gone from burlesque into the kind of grotesque often associated with German expressionism.

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[34] This is most probably a reference to the Gogol monument (by N.A. Andreyev) in Moscow: in 1909 when it was opened, the critic Yablonovski wrote in *Russkoye slovo* that the sculpture is really depressing, portraying Gogol as a sickly-looking, gloomy man with a "bird's profile." Not the right way to present a great Russian writer, according to the critic (Pilishek, web source).

[35] The argument implicit in Ivanov's text seems to be akin to that of the above-quoted contemporary historian Aleksandr Etkind who finds a strong link between pathologization and demonization of the carnal and corporeal in Russian culture with its proclivity for all sorts of utopian thinking.

Achieving the Silver Age: Coming to Terms with the Limits of Russian Discourse

What this analysis argues, therefore, is that Ivanov's best prosaic work (albeit written in the 1930s) should be considered a Silver Age phenomenon for several reasons. One is that it was produced in implicit dialogue with major thinkers and writers of the period (first and foremost, Rozanov). Second, following such literary giants of the period as Leonid Andreyev and Sologub, Ivanov modernized Russian writing by demonstrating the infinite possibilities of the erotic and sexual imagination at work, without fearing or trivializing the carnal and the corporeal—without sticking to the restrictions present in the Russian traditions. Just like Kuprin or Mikhail Kuzmin, he was keen on exploring the most extreme, deviant, illicit cases of sexual attraction.

Unlike Ivan Bunin, however, Ivanov did not see sex as something akin to and intermingled with death and decay—Ivanov's work helps confirm my assessment that Bunin actually aligns more closely with the older generation. Quite the opposite, following Rozanov (and probably the lives he saw in Parisian exile), Ivanov sees destruction and death in the *absence* of sexual intercourse. Quite tellingly, in what might be read as an implied polemic with Bunin, Ivanov completes one of the most lurid sexual fantasies of his book with a quote from none other than young Tolstoy's diary: "Это было так прекрасно, что не может кончиться со смертью" / "'This was so beautiful that it cannot end with death,' Tolstoy wrote after his wedding night" (*Распад атома* 268). Ivanov seems to be reminding Bunin that, after all, Tolstoy had not always been an adversary of pleasurable sexuality and an advocate of the soul's "liberation" from the body—Tolstoy's own experiences contradicted his philosophy. On the other hand, Ivanov issues a warning to his audiences that, by rejecting sexual intercourse, by stripping sexuality of its potential multiple meanings and making it look banal and/or shameful, Russian culture will sink into what his narrator would call the morass of "global hideousness." Russian culture will be, in short, *irrelevant* to expressions of current experience.

Thus overall, it is the rethinking of Gogol's legacy that makes Ivanov's book pertinent to the Silver Age sensitivities. Coming to terms with Gogol's role in Russia's intellectual and literary history was central to the projects of many key figures of the period as Merezhkovsky, Rozanov, Bely, and Sologub (and later Nabokov)—figures of the interwar period and early postwar period who are the lights of the Silver Age, yet not always considered

modern. If we take Ivanov's example seriously, however, that generation took the task of modernizing Russian literary culture seriously—not by refuting Gogol or Tolstoy, or in undermining their enormous aesthetic achievements, but in correctly positioning their anti-sexual, misogynist stance as an ideological alternative to Pushkin and his line of succession, i.e., by reclaiming a voice that early put forward the concept of Russian libertinage.

It is my argument, therefore, that in the literary medium (critical studies of Gogol by Bely, Rozanov or Nabokov notwithstanding), *The Decay of the Atom* appears to be the most successful reappraisal of the Gogolian tradition of silencing and burlesquing sexual and erotic experiences.[36] It is at the same time an anti-utopian text, in which socio-political freethinking is finally reconciled and intermingled with sexual and erotic freethinking. And it is a text that represents the project of his generation of authors: finding the limits and applications of Russian literary traditions for the present age—a project that, I contend in the next chapter, will also allow us new insight into Nabokov's *Lolita*.

[36] I do realize that Ivanov's long "poem in prose" is really not reducible to being a comment upon Gogol and his role in Russian culture. I have stressed only one facet of this complex text without aiming to provide an exhaustive critique of its numerous themes and motifs.

CHAPTER FIVE

NABOKOV'S *LOLITA* AND ITS PRECURSORS: SILVER AGE ROOTS AND SEXUALITY IN THE NOVEL

> Nabokov [of *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*] is an adult Russian [who liberated himself] from the malicious darkness of his native country's infantilism, sexual prohibitions and suppressed complexes.
>
> Dmitrii Galkovsky (418).

Nabokov would probably have remained a "writer for writers," a bilingual and bicultural author of texts that are addressed to a refined audience of fellow writers, critics and other intellectuals, had he not produced a shocking novel about an illicit, quasi-incestuous love affair between a thirty-six-year-old man and a twelve-year-old girl. The writer was in his mid-fifties by the time the novel was first published in Europe, and he certainly had longed for fame and commercial success. While it remains a mystery why exactly he chose to write a novel about something he was not really comfortable with, a text that would include relatively explicit and lengthy (albeit somewhat prudish and tongue-tied) descriptions of sexual intercourse between a grown male and an adolescent female, even though he made sure it was the voice of the abhorrent protagonist, not that of the omniscient author. But it is quite clear that Nabokov had realized that in order to be a success, his book had to be a shocker that would cause a scandal—just like Joyce's *Ulysses* that the Russian-American writer considered the best novel of the century (*Strong Opinions* 57).

In the early 1950s there was arguably no better choice for a writer with these intentions than to focus on sexuality and eroticism, not so much perhaps on the procreative aspect of it, but, rather, on pleasurable sex or, yet more narrowly, on deviant sexual behavior. Alfred Kinsey's initial publications in the late forties and growing public concerns about various forms of deviant sexualities (such as sexual predators and pedophiles and their victims) opened up new creative possibilities for literary artists. Psychiatric and medical discussions of sexual activities that took place outside the confines of a spousal bedroom (to use Foucault's language) provided authors like Nabokov, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, and many others with almost infinite imaginative resources. The sexological studies

of Havelock Ellis and Kinsey (among others), along with all the excitement these scientific and medical discourses caused in mass media both in Europe and the United States, secured a solid foundation for literary endeavors exploring and highlighting not so much the moral, psychiatric / psychological or legal aspects of deviant, aberrant sexual activities but their purely aesthetic, cultural and philosophic implications.

In other words, the sexual deviant—and not just a treacherous predator or ghostlike pedophile, but also an oversexed female adolescent eager to experiment with her body and sexuality—came to the forefront of literati's attention.[1] Nabokov was simply one of the first authors to concentrate on these "new" central cultural figures in the ever-changing field of literary production. In addition, his vision was enhanced by his ability of emphasizing intercultural, intercontinental contrast between Western Europe and North America; by making the male a European immigrant and the female an American schoolgirl he was able to enrich the concept of his would-be novel with various overtones. Of these, I will only name European anti-Americanism. Having moved to the US in 1940, Nabokov nonetheless needed almost a decade of observations and ruminations before he could embark on his *magnum opus*—the project of simultaneous discovering and imagining his own America via constructing a breathtakingly exciting and powerfully precise sexual metaphor, crafting a third way between Western and Russian social-psychological discourses.

Nabokov's oeuvre—and especially *Lolita*—remains at the center of critics' attention today, but as evidenced, for instance, by the recent collection *Approaches to Teaching Nabokov's* Lolita, much of current criticism is focused on making this book palatable to undergraduate students via creating a largely black-and-white canvas of the novel's major characters and events: for instance, of unsavory pedophiles Quilty and Humbert Humbert corrupting Lolita, an ordinary American teenager.[2] I will take a look back at the late 1950s to early 60s when on both sides of the Atlantic such early

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[1] For instance, the first of Kinsey's Reports, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, contained several extremely controversial chapters on adolescent and pre-adolescent sexuality both in males and females. Some of the data on their orgasms in Tables 31–34 of the Report was allegedly obtained from several pedophiles interviewed by Kinsey and his staff (Bancroft, web resource). One may safely suppose that Nabokov had known about these controversies and they had fueled his creative imagination before he embarked on writing the novel.

[2] There are some exceptions in the collection, such as the Sarah Herbold essay I quote below, in which Lolita is not presented as a powerless victim with no agency of her own (Kuzmanovich 138).

readers as Lionel Trilling and Polish author Stanislaw Lem pointed toward a much more mosaic, complex portrayal of the male and female characters by Nabokov. I will try to argue that Nabokov consciously chose, for example, to represent a continuum of "pedophilia" building on some deep discrepancies between the characters of Quilty and Humbert (to be discussed in some detail below). By making Lolita's sexual behavior in many ways quite different from her mother Charlotte, on the other hand, the author aimed to show the complexity of his vision of US womanhood. In Nabokov's novel, Lolita is in fact far from being a voiceless and powerless victim of abusive male "predators," but has a voice and agency of her own that allow her to make conscious decisions about her life and be one of the driving forces of the novel's plot.

For example, Ellen Pifer, writing on *Lolita* for one of the most significant companions to Nabokov's work edited by V. Alexandrov, does not focus on Lolita's own sexual likes and dislikes preferring to present her as a victim of the two manipulative pedophiles. The descriptions of "passion-love" of Humbert for Lolita in the novel are, for this critic, "romantic slosh" that Nabokov satirizes and ridicules. As will be clear from what follows, although there is clearly an element of parody and satire in both characters, Nabokov's portrayal of Lolita and Humbert's "illicit love" is hardly reducible to the "parody of romantic themes" operating "on so many levels" in the novel, as Pifer suggests (Alexandrov 312).

Another problem is that the novel's connections to Russia's intellectual and literary history are more often than not discussed separately from its being embedded in the US and West European socio-cultural context of the 1940s and early 50s. In this chapter I will make an effort to combine tracing *Lolita*'s Russian pedigree with its value as an American novel. I will consciously not focus on making observations about this novel's rich intertextuality and its position in the history of world literature, concentrating instead on sexual and erotic implications of Nabokov's masterpiece.[3]

I fully concur with Lionel Trilling and James Kincaid that the largely satirical metaphor Nabokov created is spearheaded with his laughter at, as Trilling argues in his famous 1958 essay "The Last Lover"

[3] The *Lolita* criticism related to the topic of the present chapter includes such well-known studies as Vladimir Alexandrov's article "*Lolita*" (Bloom 169–193) and, most recently, Aleksandr Dolinin's 2005 essay "What Happened to Sally Horner? A Real-Life Source of Nabokov's *Lolita*" (Dolinin, web resource). One of the best biographies of Nabokov's US period is Brian Boyd's 1991 *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*.

> the peculiar sexual hypocrisy of American life . . . the perpetual publicity we give to sexuality, the unending invitation made by our popular art and advertising to sexual awareness, competence and competition. To what end is a girl-child taught from her earlier years to consider the brightness and fragrance of her hair, and the shape of her body, and her look of readiness for adventure? (Trilling 364)

Kincaid, writing in late 2008, echoes Trilling:

> John Hollander, in *Partisan Review*, wrote, "*Lolita* . . . flames with a tremendous perversity." Possibly, but there's no doubt that the American public does. We have, for the past 200 or so years, progressively eroticized, put at the very heart of our constructions of the desirable, the young body, the innocent, the unspoiled. Rather than facing this head-on, we have manufactured a variety of scapegoats: day-care center operators, Roman Catholic priests, kiddie-porn rings, Internet predators. Meanwhile, we go right along, parading before us all the JonBenet Ramseys we can find: Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin, Patty McCormick, Brooke Shields, Drew Barrymore, the Olsen twins. (Kincaid, web source)

In other words, the novel can indeed be read as a satirical jab at the "sexual hypocrisy" of the US society, especially with regard to (pre)pubescent girls, but Trilling suggests that Nabokov's main purpose was to write a "story about love" (Trilling 364). Humbert's "passion-love" (to use Trilling's key term) for *Lolita* is, in addition, a Euro-American affair as its plot is built around a West European intellectual and an American teenager.

At the same time, Nabokov was an author born and raised in Russia during the Silver Age. Much of his career was spent in and closely linked to the émigré world of Paris and Berlin between the two world wars. He wrote almost exclusively in Russian prior to his moving to the US. It is therefore imperative to summarize possible Russian sources and forerunners of the novel, many of which were mentioned in the present and previous chapters. Establishing this continuity will enable me to argue that *Lolita* is in many ways an apogee in the development of post-Silver Age / modern literary discourses of sex and eroticism. At the same time, these lines of continuity may also be instrumental in understanding the limits and pitfalls of Nabokov's erotic imagination, i.e., to what extent those could be defined by his "Russianness," which he may or may not have "strangled" inside himself. Galkovsky argues that he has done so, but we will see that this may not be entirely true (Galkovsky 418).

Although the writer famously claimed that the novel is the "record of [his] love affair with the English language" (*Lolita Annotated* 316), it is important to see that it was also to a certain extent an outcome of

his love-hate relationship with Russia's intellectual and literary history. Nabokov himself was always quite straightforward about recognizing his Silver Age roots; in a letter to Wilson he states:

> The decline of Russian literature in 1905–1917 is a Soviet invention. Blok, Bely, Bunin and others wrote their best stuff in those days. And never was poetry so popular—not even in Pushkin's days. I am a product of this period, I was bred in that atmosphere. (*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 220)

Karlinsky (the editor of the volume) confirms that "Nabokov's English prose, for all its tremendous originality and undoubted individuality, frequently draws on some of the significant procedures of Russian symbolists and post-Symbolist poetry" (*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 21).

This is, then, the thrust of the present chapter: to reclaim not the Nabokov claimed by Anglophone critics, but to situate his project within that change of generations of the Silver Age—among those authors who, in exile, wrote in reference to Russian problems of expression and experience.

Lolita's *Russian Roots*

Nabokov was known to be working on the translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* as he was finishing *Lolita*; it seems the above-quoted key lines from the long poem—*Любви все возрасты покорны;… / Но в возраст поздний и бесплодный, / На повороте наших лет, / Печален страсти мертвой след*… // "All ages are resigned to love… // But in later, more fruitless life, / As we enter the middle age, / The deathly passion's imprint is sad…"—had in many ways defined the way Pushkin's line of succession evolved in the history of Russian literature (*Евгений Онегин* 201). He needed to be rediscovered, if Russian literature were to have options for discussing sexuality outside the clear limitations of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Gogol. And he needed to be reclaimed from beyond his class position and his tsarist era reputation.

Pushkin's influence on authors had, to be sure, rarely flagged. One recalls Pushkin's tsar Dadon of *The Golden Cockerel* (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) whose passionate love for the Tsarina of Shemakha ruined his friendship with the Castrate and brought about his violent murder by the ruthless Cockerel. Dostoevsky may have had this stanza in mind when he was creating Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, his most memorable libertine, pursuing Grushen'ka, a voluptuous young woman, and ending his life as

a victim of this "deathly passion."[4] In the Silver Age that influence was probably first detected and elaborated by Sologub in his detailed portrayal of the illicit love affair between a young woman Lyudmilochka and pubescent gymnasium student Sasha Pylnikov (discussed in the previous chapter). Shortly thereafter, this formula was echoed by Kuprin in his *Sulamith*, where a biblical allegory is used to present a doomed love affair between a middle-aged man and a 13-year-old girl, albeit in an exoticized setting of ancient Israel. Finally, in Nabokov's novel a man in his mid-thirties does realize the deadliness of "passion's imprint" as his "sad" infatuation with a teenage girl culminates in (self)destruction and death. As I read it, Humbert's predicament constitutes an evident break away from the reasoning of Tolstoy or Bunin, who both refused to accept the parity between sexuality/corporeality and "pure spirituality," claiming the supremacy of the latter.[5] At the same time, Humbert could arguably also be linked to one of the most memorable plot lines of G. Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom*.

In Ivanov's "poem in prose," there is a character called the "[government] minister who signed the Treaty of Versailles" and who fell in love with a young girl and eventually went to jail on corruption charges caused by this adulterous affair (perhaps this was Ivanov's distorted, largely fictional account of Britain's ex-prime minister Lloyd George's extramarital liaison with Frances Stevenson, his secretary, in 1913). The narrator compares this man's fall from grace with an "experienced and old" rat that was careless enough to eat the poison and die:

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[4] Stanislaw Lem in his 1962 review of *Lolita* also discusses Dostoevsky's Svidrigailov and Stavrogin as possible predecessors of Humbert. However, he stops short of equating the pedophilic deeds of both characters with H.H.'s passion-love for Lolita. Indeed, it is hard to compare Nabokov's ubiquitous gloomy irony with Dostoevsky's moralistic slant toward sexual abuse of a minor as a sin and crime equivalent to murder or even worse than that as it involves pleasurable sex making it (in Dostoevsky's eyes) even more irredeemable (Lem, web resource).

Julian Connolly in his recent *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's "Lolita"* argues that the character of H.H. harks back to the narrators of *Notes from the Underground* and "The Meek One" (incorrectly translated as "The Gentle Creature"). I think Connolly's attempt to position Dostoevsky as a Nabokov predecessor of sorts is unsuccessful and can only reiterate that it is impossible to see any resemblance between H.H.'s (and his author's) ubiquitous ironic tone and Dostoevsky's moralizing. In addition, although Connolly ambitiously entitles his subchapter "The Precursors of Lolita," he simply ignores any of Russia's Silver Age roots of the novel discussed in this chapter. Indeed, Nabokov may have been influenced by certain works of Dostoevsky, but only through the prism of Sologub, Rozanov, Kuprin, Ivanov and other Silver Age authors highlighted here (Connolly 9–28).

[5] As far as Bunin is concerned, certain stories of his collection *Dark Alleys* may have influenced the author of *Lolita*, most probably "Galya Ganskaya" (briefly described in the previous chapter).

> How could the minister . . . in his old age be caught stealing because of a little girl? . . . A little girl [appears] all of a sudden, her stockings, knees, soft warm breath, a soft pink vagina (*теплое розовое влагалище*)—and the Treaty of Versailles and all his regalia are gone. The defamed old man is dying in his prison bed. (*Распад атома* 268)

Despite the fact that Ivanov's minister is unable to resist the fatal attraction and ends up destroying his life and career, the writer is far from blaming him for that. Rather, he purports to show how sexuality works, how firm its grip on a person's thoughts and actions is.

This parallel may well be more than accidental, if one looks more carefully at Nabokov's history than at his myth. In "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," Nabokov claims that

> the first little throb of *Lolita* went through me in late 1939 or early 1940, in Paris, at a time when I was laid up with a severe attack of intercostals neuralgia . . . The initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: the sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage. (*Lolita Annotated* 311)

In other words, although Nabokov a.k.a. Sirin had wrathfully dismissed Ivanov's long poem in prose when it was published in 1938 (his review of *The Decay of the Atom* is quoted above), he seems to have taken off right where Ivanov stopped: he decided to have the "minister" paint the picture of the bars of his prison cell.[6]

The Enchanter's "Carnal Postulate"

To use Nabokov's language, the "first throb" of *Lolita* may as well have gone through him upon reading (and badmouthing) Ivanov's *The Decay*

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[6] Incidentally, Aleksandr Dolinin, a Nabokov scholar, believes that the novella «Волшебник» / "The Enchanter," (1939, discussed below) was largely a response to the "challenge" of Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom*, as the former argues that Ivanov's "world's hideousness" can be transformed by "harmonious art." Dolinin also notes some direct intertextual echoing between the two texts (Dolinin 156–158). The image also harks back to two German sources: Rainer Maria Rilke's *Dinggedicht* "Der Panther" (1902), which takes the point of view of the animal looking through the bars, and Franz Kafka's 1917 "Report to an Academy" ("Ein Bericht für eine Akademie"), about an ape who has learned to live like a human being after being abducted from the jungle (and who has fallen in love with an inappropriate, uncivilized chimpanzee, whom he uses sexually). I am thankful to Professor Katie Arens for pointing out these important parallels.

of the Atom. Both authors saw deviant sexuality as a cage with iron bars, which helps explain the compassion and humanity, with which they depict their paraphilic characters (the lustful minister and the avatar of Gogol's Bashmachkin in Ivanov, discussed in detail in the previous chapter; Arthur "the Enchanter" and Humbert Humbert in Nabokov).

The first reincarnation of the minister is the unnamed protagonist of *The Enchanter* (in some early drafts he was named Arthur). Just like H.H., he is a Central European of some sort of an intellectual profession. He is about 40 years old. The plot is very simple and indeed resembles that of the later novel *Lolita* (it could easily be read as a *mise-en-abyme* / a story within a story, had it been placed inside the novel). The man is attracted to young pubescent girls of around twelve, but has never had any sexual relationships with any of them. He meets an ailing widow, perhaps French, of about his age that is about to die. Her 12-year-old nymphet-like daughter, quite predictably, captures his imagination. He marries the dying woman and, as soon as she dies, the man gains custody of the child and goes traveling with her. In a hotel room, in the middle of the night, he attempts to touch the sleeping girl's body and achieve an orgasm by rubbing his erect penis against her thigh (the penis is black-humorously likened to a magician's wand), but she suddenly wakes up, sees his erection and starts screaming hysterically. In an ensuing almost *Anna Karenina*-like finale, the Enchanter fights his way to the street and is run over by a passing streetcar or, possibly, suburban train.

Dmitri Nabokov, the writer's son and translator of the novella, compares its heroine, really not much of an autonomous agent, with Lolita, for whom she was the main forerunner:

> Dolores Haze may, as Nabokov says, be "very much the same lass" as the Enchanter's victim, but only in an inspirational, conceptional sense. In other ways the earlier child is very different—perverse only in the madman's eyes; innocently incapable of anything like the Quilty intrigue; sexually unawakened and physically immature. (*The Enchanter* 127)

The novella, according to D. Nabokov's afterword, "does contain what might be called the 'central theme' (if little else) of *Lolita*" (*The Enchanter* 126). However, he is quick to downplay the connection between its unnamed protagonist and Humbert Humbert, calling the enchanter a contemptible "cynic," a "criminal pedophile," and a "madman": "Like certain other Nabokov's works, *The Enchanter* is the study of madness seen through the madman's mind." The girl is "relegated forever to the category of very distant relative" of Lolita (*The Enchanter* 111–115, 126).

Humbert is surely a more complex character than Arthur who seems much more of a madman and less of a refined intellectual in comparison with H.H. I would argue, nonetheless, that connections between Arthur and Humbert are more real and important than it seemed to the writer's son and translator. We remember from *Lolita* that H.H. comes full circle and partially redeems himself when he eventually finds his Lolita, now married and pregnant Mrs. Dolly Schiller, and all of a sudden feels still desperately in love with her (discussed below in some detail). When Arthur envisages his future cohabitation with his nymphet, he is far from his usual cynicism as well. More than that, his ruminations can hardly be those of a madman:

> As he imagined the coming years, he continued to envision her as an adolescent—*such was the carnal postulate*... He realized... that the gradual progression of successive delights would assure natural renewals of his pact with happiness... Against the light of that happiness, no matter what age she attained—seventeen, twenty—her present image would always transpire through her metamorphoses, nourishing their translucent strata from its internal fountainhead. And this very process would allow him... to savor each unblemished stage of her transformations. (*The Enchanter* 74–75. Italics added.)

We do know that the protagonist was unable to live up to his reveries and plans of mutual gratification in their future relationship, but it is crucial to realize that at least he had toyed with the idea. This circumstance contradicts viewing him as a cynical and merciless sexual predator who abuses the pubescent girl and allows readers to think of him as more of Humbert's precursor.

One is led also to disagree with Vladimir Nabokov himself, as Lolita and her predecessor in the novella appear really worlds apart. Very much like various anonymous female characters in Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom*, the anonymous girl is speechless and voiceless in the story, i.e., reduced to her secondary role and stripped of any agency of her own. Conversely, Lolita is, as argued below, a driving force of the whole novel; her womanhood is portrayed as convincingly as Humbert's manhood.

One may conclude that, having been challenged and inspired by his bitter rival Ivanov, Nabokov pushed literary representation of human sexuality a step further: after experimenting with it in *The Enchanter*, he is able to have this story "grow in secret the claws and wings of the novel" (*The Enchanter* 13) and create Lolita, a precocious female child whose attraction to Humbert and Quilty is as important to Nabokov's readers as their attraction to her. Nabokov achieves this transformation by going back to

such characters of his Russian teachers and Silver Age predecessors as Kuprin's Sulamith and Sologub's Sasha Pylnikov, and rests his *magnum opus* not only on the shoulders of the literary giants of Western literatures (Edgar Poe, Lewis Carroll, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, among others) but also on the enormous discursive formation built around the personality, circle and philosophy of sexuality of Vasilii Rozanov in the Silver Age. In this sense, the novel *Lolita* (if seen as a Russian, post-Silver Age, literary phenomenon) completes and crowns the project of Russian literary modernization of sexualities and eroticism.

"Rules of Attraction" in Lolita

The minister's and Arthur's avatar is now Humbert Humbert writing his memoir as he is in jail awaiting his trial. The cage bars he is sketching stand for his own "aberrant" sexuality, or, to be exact, his "vandalized love-map" that has him constantly trying to recreate his unconsummated, but extremely passionate "child love" for Annabel Leigh when they were both twelve (another familiar literary reference, to Edgar Allan Poe's underage *amour*). Nabokov was hardly concerned with a moral-legal perspective on sexual deviance but, rather, with aesthetic and cultural implications of representing it in a literary medium. This implies that one will gain little or nothing labeling Humbert a "pedophile," "pornographer," "sex predator" or "incestuous rapist," nor in seeking his impetus strictly in period sexology. Rather, it is much more instructive to see what exactly his predicament was, why he acted the way he did and what conclusions about human sexuality, love and affection can be drawn from his experience. Calling Humbert a "deviant" obviates the need to understand the discourse that the man used to justify his behavior as plausible, given that the character is anything but crazy in his deviance—he plans and achieves gratification in his relationship.

The task of gaining a deeper understanding of sexual love through the eyes of the "deviant," or the "pervert," is aptly formulated by Stanislaw Lem:

> The perennial problem of human nature susceptible to sin, the problem of a contingent line of prohibitions violated by outstanding personalities or unchanged throughout history, the line that maybe even the Neanderthal man started thinking of; this problem is concentrated inside the so-called pervert in a special way, very concretely and with the highest tension. It is here that we start to realize that the "pervert" is simply a magnifying glass,

> that the problem is not to study the perversion but in the choice of artistic means, which would enable to ultimately have a new (and this is the most difficult thing in literature) feeling, new experience of the problem of sex and love. (Lem, web resource)

This task of better understanding eroticism and sexuality as Nabokov saw those via Humbert the "pervert" is made easier for us by the author who focuses on the nature of his character's "perversion" with a great amount of detail—we know the stories he tells himself. Nonetheless, as I will try to show, the book is entitled *Lolita*, not otherwise; and she (the *nymphet*) is indeed a central character of the novel. After all, it is Lolita's sexual energy and ability to act and take decisions that in many ways drives the novel's plot. Finally, any discussion of the sexual and corporeal in the novel will be incomplete without focusing on Charlotte and Quilty, the two characters without whom it would be impossible to understand Lolita and Humbert respectively, because they are the other representatives of the alternate discourse realm in Humbert's head.

As concerns the contours of criticism of the representations of sex and eroticism in *Lolita* as it has developed from the initial input of such figures as Lionel Trilling and Stanislaw Lem until today, I share the observations of James Kincaid:

> Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, published in America 50 years ago, has engendered the most embarrassed, looking-sideways-for-the-exit, highfalutin, and obscurantist talk of any book ever written—any. Only a handful of critics have been forthright, most famously, Lionel Trilling: "Lolita is about love. Perhaps I shall be better understood if I put the statement in this form: Lolita is not about sex, but about love"...
>
> Somehow, not all commentators and readers have lined up behind Trilling on this point, many finding themselves agreeing... that the novel is clearly about pedophilia, rape, and the destruction of innocence by a vile, if fancy-talking, Humbert of a monster. (Kincaid, web source)

What I propose doing here is close to what Kincaid suggests: going back to Trilling's thesis that he quotes, but also trying to complement it with Lem's sensitivity to the role of Humbert's deviance in writing a modern novel about love and sex—as recharting stereotyped discourses for a new era. I would argue that Trilling somewhat artificially separates love from sex in his formula, but as I will try to show in what follows, he does so following, or being enchanted by, Nabokov's own limited vision of human sexuality and corporeality in perhaps the most infamous "pornographic" novel of the century.

To facilitate my task of describing how the "rules of attraction" (to use the Bret Easton Ellis novel title) function in the novel and in what ways some of its characters (despite their North American / West European "pedigree") evolved from their forerunners in Russia's Silver Age and even early Soviet literature, I will explore what can be called their "sexual portraits" in pairs as these "couples," or pair-bonds, are formed (or fail to form) throughout the course of the novel. This seems to be the most effective approach to studying the respective "lovemaps" of each central character (via their love interests or pair-bonds each of them has attempted to create with a matching partner), and to tie those maps to the project of discourses of sexuality that I have been tracing within the Russian context.

Charlotte-Quilty, Charlotte-Humbert

These Russian connections are clearly documented in the Nabokov literature. For example, one of the seldom-noted sources of *Lolita* is Ilya Ilf and Yevgeni Petrov's famous Ostap Bender dilogy, *Twelve Chairs* (1928) and *The Golden Calf* (1931). While Nabokov rejected Soviet tradition as a whole, he did repeatedly single out several authors for praise, including Olesha, Zoshchenko, and the two satirists from Odessa Ilf and Petrov. When asked in a 1965 interview if there were any writers of the Soviet period he admired, he responded:

> There were a few writers who discovered that if they chose certain plots and certain characters they could get away with it in the political sense, in other words, they wouldn't be told what to write and how to finish the novel. Ilf and Petrov, two wonderfully gifted writers, decided that if they had a rascal adventurer as protagonist, whatever they wrote about his adventures could not be criticized from a political point of view since a perfect rascal or a madman or a delinquent . . . any picaresque character . . . could not be accused of either being a bad Communist or not being a good Communist. (*Strong Opinions* 87)[7]

Among other things, this conception appears to have influenced Nabokov's initial design of the novel, as he had clearly intended to walk a thin line between creating a sensational, commercially successful book he would be remembered for and not causing too much public outrage, especially

[7] In a letter to Wilson dated October 30, 1945, Nabokov shows his admiration for these authors: "The [Konstantin] Simonov book [*Days and Nights*] is neither better nor much worse than the trash published in Russia during the last 26 years (always excepting Olesha, Pasternak, and Ilf-Petrov)" (*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 157). Incidentally, this may have been the time when he conceived of the idea of *Lolita*.

in the United States, a culture known for its Puritanism and hypocrisy about sex. Fortunately for him, the job was made easier by Alfred Kinsey's publications in the late forties to early fifties and the exponentially growing interest in sexual deviation behind the façade of normalcy. Yet another convention of the bestseller genre that the author had to wrestle with is a happy end, which Nabokov was certainly unwilling to have and felt that he needed to shroud the dramatic finale of *Lolita* in a cloud of ambiguity and "black humor." All these strategies had been successfully dealt with and tested by Ilf and Petrov, whose novels enjoyed immense popularity in the Soviet Union (especially with younger readers) in spite of being blasphemously critical of the Soviet regime.

There are numerous allusions to the two Ilf and Petrov novels in the text of *Lolita*. For example, Humbert's way addressing the "Gentlemen and Gentlewomen of the Jury" is clearly borrowed from *The Golden Calf*, in which the protagonist Ostap uses exactly the same way of addressing the imaginary audience as he blackmails the underground Soviet millionaire into sharing one of his millions with the Ostap-led gang of adventurers. Besides, the overall tonality of playfulness and "black humor" of Humbert's confessions may have been prompted by Ilf and Petrov's venomous irony toward nearly everything in the Soviet socio-cultural landscape. Most strikingly, as Lem notes, Humbert's laughter is aimed at something nobody else before him has been able to effortlessly ridicule—*his own* lust and concupiscence.[8] Bender is similarly ironic about his own sexual impulses in both novels. But it seems to me that the most conspicuous parallel between

[8] Lem thinks that this ubiquitous irony is what differs Nabokov from the ever-pontificating Dostoevsky. His example of the lustful that Nabokov's H.H. turns into the ludicrous is his daydreams about leaving the school in Beardsley with Lolita, crossing the Mexican border and "lying low" with her for several years before he could legally marry her. He is concerned that her "nymphage" would then end as she comes of age but quickly finds the solution:

> . . . With patience and luck I might have her produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the second, who would be eight or nine around 1960, when I would still be *dans la force de l'âge* . . . a *vieillard encore vert* . . . bizarre, tender, salivating Dr. Humbert, practicing on supremely lovely Lolita the Third the art of being a granddad. (*Lolita Annotated* 173–174)

Lem emphasizes the fact that the filthiness and cynicism of these dreams borders on the comical and humorous, which allows Humbert to get away with his "priapic superoptimism" (Lem, web resource). But I would note that the Humbert/Nabokov irony is built upon pathologizing lust, bringing it to the point of being absurd (albeit ironically), which echoes what I have called the tradition of the burlesque dating back to Gogol as its founding father. Nabokov's representation of sexuality in *Lolita* is thus ambiguous: simultaneously innovative (i.e., following Kuprin and Georgii Ivanov, among others) and embedded in the Gogol-Dostoevsky-Bunin line of succession.

Lolita and *Twelve Chairs* is the fact that the character of the widow Haze is modeled in part upon that of the widow Gritsatsuyeva.

Ostap Bender's idea of marrying the widow to get hold of her several chairs, inside which the diamonds may have been hidden, is similar to Humbert's cold-blooded consent to wed the "Haze woman," hoping that the minor inconvenience of a convenience marriage would allow him to be closer to the object of his passion, Charlotte's longed-for daughter. Resemblances between Gritsatsuyeva and Charlotte are numerous. Both women can be qualified as "a passionate woman, a poet's dream" / *знойная женщина, мечта поэта* (Ilf & Petrov 181); they look similar (corpulent, large-breasted: Charlotte is memorably "of the noble nipple and massive thigh," while M-me Gritsatsuyeva's bosom is likened to a pair of "watermelons") and are of the same age (thirty-five). Both adore their equally indifferent and treacherous husbands and insist on addressing them officiously: Comrade Bender and Mr. Humbert respectively (*Lolita Annotated* 76, 75).

Having discussed one of Charlotte's possible prototypes, I will now turn to the way her sexuality is portrayed in the novel. Charlotte's affection for H.H. may have been preceded by her flirtatious affair with Quilty, a celebrity playwright who had visited Ramsdale two or three years prior to H.H.'s arrival and fondled Lolita in his lap during a matinee. These events are highlighted in Stanley Kubrick's movie, with the screenplay written by Nabokov himself, but in the novel's text it is Lolita who confirms Humbert's suspicion of Quilty being her mother's "friend":

> Well, did I know that [Quilty] had known her mother [Lolita asked]? That he was practically an old friend? That he had visited with his uncle . . . and spoken at Mother's club, and had tugged and pulled her, Dolly, by her bare arm onto his lap in front of everybody, and kissed her face, and she was ten and furious with him? (*Lolita Annotated* 272)

Earlier, just as Lolita runs away with her secret lover, Humbert supposes that Quilty could have had an affair with Charlotte:

> The gruesome 'Harold Haze, Tombstone, Arizona . . . implied a familiarity with the girl's past that in nightmare fashion suggested for a moment that my quarry was an old friend of the family, maybe an old flame of Charlotte's . . . (*Lolita Annotated* 251)

After all, Lem seems oblivious to the fact that not all Dostoevsky characters are asexual or lack irony in corporeal and erotic matters; Fyodor Pavlovich of *The Brothers Karamazov* again comes to mind.

Finally, Quilty himself teasingly confides to Humbert: "I knew your dear wife slightly" (*Lolita Annotated* 302). In other words, Charlotte and Lolita, the mother and daughter, are ultimate rivals; they are both interested in the same two men, and their respective attractions to them seem to fuel and inflame each other. We also know that Lolita liked H.H. initially because he resembled Quilty whose picture from a cigarette ad she had posted above her bed, although H.H. himself thinks the "resemblance was slight" (*Lolita Annotated* 43, 69). It seems quite plausible that Charlotte developed her own crush on Humbert for the same reason; after all, Nabokov repeatedly makes a satirical comment about popular culture's domination over Americans' tastes and manners; both men look like "Hollywood-type" males.

It is very important for Nabokov to show that, despite their deceptive mutual animosity, the mother and daughter are deeply connected to each other through this sort of continuity of their respective attractions (although their lovemaps are clearly different, as Lolita is attracted to men three times her age, Quilty and, for a little while, H.H.; while there is little or nothing irregular about Charlotte's sexual tastes); it is observable in the initial episodes as Humbert the narrator explicitly refers to the two women as "rivals"; Charlotte insists that her daughter is "unwanted" by H.H.; finally, Humbert complains to his readers that the "Haze woman . . . was more afraid of Lo's deriving some pleasure from me than of my enjoying Lo" (*Lolita Annotated* 48, 51, 56).

The last comment by H.H. is crucial for understanding the fact that sexual pleasure is at the center of all the power-related interactions in the novel, and not just from the male point of view. But only Charlotte, a religious, righteous woman, seems to derive pleasure from "normal" sexual intercourse with someone roughly her age. All the other characters seem to have developed all sorts of paraphilias: Quilty is clearly a pedophile, an amateurish pornographer, and a group sex / orgy enthusiast; H.H. is secretly attracted to Annabel look-alikes, i.e., "nymphets" of about twelve years-old; Lolita, a "precocious pet," purportedly likes grown men in their mid to late thirties; even Harold Haze, Charlotte's deceased husband, was into some strange sexual practices that have amused H.H. as Charlotte *confesses* to him about those. In other words, yet another trait that makes the Charlotte character boring and commonplace is her normalcy / healthiness: "Her autobiography was as devoid of interests as her autopsy would have been. I never saw a healthier woman than she, despite thinning diets" (*Lolita Annotated* 80).

But it is a proclivity for the just mentioned confession about one's sexual pleasures and idiosyncrasies that Humbert and Charlotte appear to have in common. Remember that, ever since the Middle Ages at least, "Western man has become a confessing animal," Foucault argues (*History of Sexuality* 59). Just as H.H.'s account of his passion-love for Lolita is subtitled *The Confession of a White Widowed Male*, Charlotte is obsessed with confessing about her sexual experience and forcing her ungodly partner into confessing about his (this is arguably one of the most entertaining, wildly humorous passages of the Nabokov novel):

> I never thought that she would be so crazily jealous of anything in my life that had not been she. She showed a fierce insatiable curiosity for my past . . . I had to invent . . . a long series of mistresses for Charlotte's morbid delectation . . . Never in my life had I confessed so much or received so many confessions. (*Lolita Annotated* 79–80)

For Humbert, writing a memoir about his infatuation with a twelve-year-old girl is a secular confession aimed at the aesthetic/philosophic task of "fixing once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (*Lolita Annotated* 134). He also wants, as Foucault would say, "to articulate [his] sexual peculiarity, no matter how extreme" (*History of Sexuality* 61). For Charlotte, confession is a religious discursive practice that she is forced to engage in by her Catholic faith and, in her turn, forces others to engage in it. One of the main conflicts of the novel is brought about by this collision of American pre-modern religiosity/spirituality personified by Charlotte and the modernized European discourse of the body, bodily needs and functions (including sexual aberrations) personified by Humbert. This is precisely where the novel's satirical, anti-American undercurrents merge with its sexual and erotic themes.

However, Humbert with his "old-world reticence" (in Charlotte's apt phrase [*Lolita Annotated* 68]) is shocked by Charlotte's pleonastic confessions because he is in fact reticent about sexual matters, and because he is a sexual hypocrite, as I will try to show in what follows. Lem calls Humbert a sexual "Pharisee," a "low-ranking sex criminal" (Lem, web resource), which undoubtedly compromises his credentials as a modern man and hints at Nabokov's own ambivalent feelings about more open literary and cultural discourses of sex and eroticism. But, after all, this pre-modern element of reticence, H.H.'s "dark romantic European way," is precisely what must have made him attractive to Charlotte, a quintessential US woman.

In other words, Humbert, despite all Nabokov's ambivalence in portraying him, is a European modern man, the nature of whose confessions

("of a white widowed male"), if we use the Foucault's language again, are much more of a sexological discourse than Charlotte's anachronistic attempts to recreate purely spiritual confession mechanisms of her religious faith being in a pair-bond with a partner who will not appreciate it. This is certainly the tragedy of this female character's fate, but also Nabokov's darkly ironic comment on American womanhood.

Humbert-Annabel, Humbert-Lolita

Another source comes from Eastern Europe to play into *Lolita*. It is well-known from the Nabokov-Wilson correspondence (and aptly commented upon by Simon Karlinsky) that in 1948 Edmund Wilson sent Nabokov a copy of Havelock Ellis's collected writings. It is unclear whether Nabokov read the whole book, but he clearly paid special attention to "*Confession sexuelle d'un Russe* du Sud, né vers 1870" (1912) written by an anonymous author in French which Ellis included as an appendix (*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 201–202).

Henry Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), nicknamed the "English Freud," was a psychologist, sexologist and literary critic, famous now mainly for his pioneering work on autoerotism, homosexuality, etc. In his university textbook *Psychology of Sex* (1933) (that Nabokov was obviously also familiar with) Ellis defines two types of pedophiles: mentally disabled people and refined intellectuals (Galinskaya, web resource). Nabokov arguably combined the two types into one imaginary character; H.H. is both a sophisticated scholar and a patient of psycho-neurological clinics throughout his life (including his last days). "You have to be an artist *and* a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy" to discern a nymphet among other adolescent girls (*Lolita Annotated* 17; italics added)

Dmitri, the writer's son, confirms the importance of "Confession sexuelle . . ." for Nabokov's design of *Lolita* and creation of the male protagonist but warns against overrating the Ellis connection, the reason being that the above-mentioned novella *Волшебник / The Enchanter* had been written in 1939, about nine years before Nabokov became familiar with Ellis's work.

It is interesting that this Ukrainian author of yet another sexual confession involved in the conception of *Lolita* sounds really desperate about his utter inability to control his sexual urges toward young girls of eleven to fifteen years old. Just like H.H. whose really unbridled, precocious passion for Annabel seems to have forever "vandalized" his lovemap, the Ukrainian reveals that at the age of twelve he was seduced by several (!) young girls

of his age (in addition to several older women). Exactly as in Humbert's account of his first intercourse with Lolita, the author complains of being seduced by teenage girls when he was past thirty years old; as a matter of fact, the girls turned out to be more experienced sexually than he was, and it was their continuing availability that led to his loss of control over his sex impulses. However, the narrator's paraphilia was more pathological than Humbert's: for instance, he was in the habit of "exhibiting himself to [young girls] at outdoor urinals" (*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 201–202).[9]

It is much less important for me here to what extent Nabokov borrowed from this confession appended to Ellis's book or why Wilson, his supplier of erotic and sexological texts, ended up disliking *Lolita* so much (both questions have been explored by Karlinsky). I am much more interested in this link to Havelock Ellis as yet another bit of evidence (in addition to the Kinsey connection) for the novel's profound contextualization in the sexological discourses of his times. It is difficult to imagine that *Lolita* would have been possible without these provocative hypotheses about the nature of pedophilia, adolescent sexuality, the phenomenon of precocity in sexual development of young children, etc. Nabokov was undoubtedly delighted about the chance of exploring, for instance, the bizarre continuity of this precocity as Humbert the passionate lover of Annabel metamorphoses into a sexual Pharisee who ruthlessly pursues the pubescent Lolita, but eventually completes the full circle and comes back to where he started. Now he is desperately in love with the seventeen-year-old pregnant Dolly Schiller and therefore fully redeemed. The Ukrainian landowner's "lascivious report" (as Nabokov refers to the Ukrainian's confession in his memoir *Drugie berega*) is therefore extremely helpful in clarifying H.H. sexual predicament.

Secondly, treating the anonymous Ukrainian landowner's text as a precursor of *Lolita* sheds light on Humbert being really a "wolf in sheep's clothing": his East Slavic pedigree becomes more and more conspicuous

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[9] Incidentally, Havelock Ellis himself apparently was a *urophile*; he enjoyed seeing women urinate (he called this paraphilia "undinism," but now it is known as *urolagnia*). It is possible that Nabokov has omitted both the Ukrainian's strange case of exhibitionism and Ellis's urolagnia simply because he was disgusted by the descriptions of "sex organs" and bodily functions (including urination and defecation) in the twentieth century novel he liked most of all, Joyce's *Ulysses* (*Lolita Annotated* lii–liii). I wrote above about Nabokov's attack on Georgii Ivanov's groundbreaking *The Decay of the Atom*, which was also connected to the latter's "obsession with latrines" and "indecencies" related to sexuality. In other words, despite Nabokov's strong interest in eroticism and sexual behavior, he was rather prudishly intolerant of any deviations from the "norm" (including homosexuality) and of the physical and physiological side of sexual intercourse itself.

underneath his vaunted Europeanness. Not only he is a new Ostap Bender endowed with an invincible sense of humor and dark irony (undoubtedly Russian in his incorrigible *глумление* and *юродствование*: as Lem has noticed, he even mocks his own lust); he is also in part an heir to the unfortunate Ukrainian's multiple sexual disorders. As I will suppose in what follows, H.H.'s sexual hypocrisy, his pharisaic and egotistic urge for comfort and convenience in matters of sexual love and attraction, and his nasty tendency to blackmail his own sex partner make him akin to Peredonov of the Sologub novel discussed in the previous chapter (not only to Liudmilochka Rutilova who indulges in complex sexual games with a pubescent boy—the parallel that Viktor Yerofeyev highlights).[10]

Throughout the course of the novel, the readers learn quite a lot about Humbert's sexual idiosyncrasy. The defining moment of his pubescence was an unusually intense erotic relationship with Annabel, his coeval, whose image was to be forever imprinted upon his mind and to shape his lovemap:[11] "We loved each other with a premature love, marked by a fierceness that so often destroys adult lives" (*Lolita Annotated* 18). Their mutual passion was indeed an agony for both of them, but coming from educated, upper middle class families they could not "mate as slum children would have so easily found an opportunity to do." In the conventional reading, their desire remained unconsummated, and it undoubtedly traumatized Humbert for the rest of his life. Contrary to his opinion, there is nothing "magic or fateful" about the fact that "Lolita began with Annabel." As we learn, the two girls were of the same age (twelve) and looked strikingly alike. The power of his attraction to Annabel was such that he kept looking for her reincarnation throughout his life, while her unattainable image kept haunting and tormenting him (*Lolita Annotated* 12).

Nabokov presents the Annabel-Humbert adolescent love in a very erotic way; maybe the most erotic passage of the book is when both partners exchange manual stimulation of each other's genitals (*Lolita Annotated* 14–15). The author clearly wants his readers to see that Western cultures have a conspicuous double standard about the age difference between

[10] This insightful parallel between Sologub and Nabokov is briefly made in Yerofeyev's introduction to the first Soviet/Russian publication of *Lolita* (Nabokov 1989, 8). Connections between the two authors are also discussed by Yuri Leving in his essay "Rumble of Non-existence (V. Nabokov and F. Sologub)."

[11] This is a thoroughly explored allusion (e.g., by Appel) to Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Annabel Lee" (1849). Nabokov admired Poe; there are more than twenty allusions to his work throughout *Lolita* (*Lolita Annotated* 328–334).

the partners. Although the two situations are of course vastly different, it is perfectly feasible to represent intercourse between people of the same age, be they even teenagers, but it is much harder to find a way to describe consensual intercourse between a thirty-six-year-old man and twelve-year-old adolescent; this is exactly why the narrator's descriptions of sexual acts become more reticent and laconic as the plot unravels (contrary to the genre of pornography, one of the conventions of which is the growing of arousing verbal or visual imagery). It is also interesting that the H.H.-Annabel sessions of petting are repeatedly interrupted by strangers and relatives alike, which points to the fact that, in John Money's terms, adults could not be cooperative in allowing the two children more freedom in their "sexuoerotic rehearsal play" (Money 24–25). According to Money, this lack (along with severe punishment adults often inflict on children when they catch them playing proto-sexual games) later may lead to the vandalization of lovemaps and to paraphilias. Shortly thereafter, Annabel dies of typhus, and Humbert is thus prevented from establishing a lasting pair-bond with her. Instead, he becomes a paraphile who is attracted to Lolita-like girls and for whom there are "two sexes, neither of which is [his]," adult and teenage women (*Lolita Annotated* 18).[12]

But is Humbert really a sex predator and a true pedophile? Here again, those words may come from Western discourses on sexuality, while the novel offers material for a somewhat different story to be told. We know that, prior to meeting Lolita, Humbert has never had sex with underage girls. Before he reached his mid-thirties he was not even sure of the nature of his paraphilia: "In my twenties and early thirties, I did not understand my throes quite so clearly. While my body knew what it craved for, my mind rejected my body's every plea" (*Lolita Annotated* 18). Monique, the French prostitute he asks to role-play a nymphet, is in fact eighteen years of age. Valeria, his wife, was in her late twenties, but happened to look like a "little girl." Despite his attractiveness to women, he was "dreadfully stupid . . . in matters of sex" (*Lolita Annotated* 22, 25).

Then, finally, nearly twenty-five years after the Annabel affair, he sees Lolita and experiences the "flash . . . of passionate recognition." Indeed, it was "the same child—the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair." Even a "tiny mole

[12] This is not intended as an attempt to show that Nabokov's fiction and Money's research are in any way related to each other. I am just using Money's findings to comment on this particular motif of the novel.

on her side" is the same (*Lolita Annotated* 39). Later, the reader learns that Lolita "smelt almost exactly like" Annabel, a "torrid odor that at once set my manhood astir" (*Lolita Annotated* 42). In other words, Nabokov is careful to convince us of a striking resemblance between the two twelve-year-olds in the way they looked like, walked, smelt, talked, etc. This doubling is extremely important as it may prove (and both Lem and Trilling might agree with this) that there is much more of a monomaniac (akin to Melville's Captain Ahab) in H.H. than a pedophile/hebephile: "... *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is—Lolita" (*Lolita Annotated* 45).

What happens in the following month and a half is that Lolita also develops an affection for Humbert, and her sympathy is far from being asexual or non-erotic, no matter how much a feminist reader today might protest the realism of that description. First of all, he looks like a man from the ad she has posted in her room. Second, to her, H.H. looks similar to Quilty, whom she remembers very well from the club meeting two or three years prior when he had her in his lap and touched her inappropriately. Does the author want us to believe Humbert—that, when he surreptitiously reached an orgasm with Lolita fidgeting in his lap, the child really "had noticed nothing" (*Lolita Annotated* 43, 61)? H.H. has no way of knowing this for sure, but some readers will note that this oversexed and precocious girl must have, in fact, taken note of what was going on and what the "shy, studious gentleman" was trying to achieve. But Lem is absolutely right: H.H. is a Pharisee and an ultimate conformist; it is much more important for him to make sure everybody is happy, "alive, unraped," so that his own conservative, at times almost Victorian, moral principles are not disturbed either (*Lolita Annotated* 64, 66). His hypocrisy and conformism bordering on the grotesque are best revealed in the following ludicrous address to the "gentlemen of the jury":

> The majority of sex offenders that hanker for some throbbing, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, relation with a girl-child, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask the community to allow them to pursue their practically harmless, so-called aberrant behavior, their little hot wet private acts of sexual deviation without the police and society cracking down upon them. We are not sex fiends. We do not rape as soldiers do. We are unhappy, mild, dog-eyed gentlemen, sufficiently well-integrated to control our urge in the presence of adults, but ready to give years and years of life for one chance to touch a nymphet. (*Lolita Annotated* 87–88)

What we observe here is H.H.'s failure to hide his sexual hypocrisy behind his ironic *глумление*, as he also misinterprets his own sexuality: it is not *a* nymphet that he has been willing to possess, but the one who would very closely resemble Annabel (in any event, the readers are unaware of any serious attempts of his to "touch" one prior to him meeting Lolita). Besides, he shows lack of experience and inexplicable squeamishness about genital intercourse: how can a sexual relationship be simultaneously physical and not coital? *Lolita* is definitely a very funny book, in which a standup comedian's punch line is always crucial for Nabokov, but it is doubtful that he wanted his protagonist and narrator to sound that illogical and unconvincing. As will be noted below, this passage may be one of the textual indicators of Nabokov's own uneasiness about functions of the human body, including those pertaining to sexuality.

As Humbert begins his traveling with Lolita, we learn several important things. First, Lolita is "sort of fond of" him as she puts it herself "with a sort of sigh" and "sort of" moves closer to him in the car (*Lolita Annotated* 115). Second, we learn that she has been deflowered by the boy Charlie in the camp, where she may have also had some lesbian experience. Third, it is clear that, despite being just a teenager, she is as sexually experienced as the thirty-seven-year-old H.H. (or more), and she considers, as Humbert puts it in his haughty, quasi-Victorian jargon, all "caresses except kisses on the mouth or the stark act of love either 'romantic slosh' or 'abnormal' " (*Lolita Annotated* 133). It is certainly ludicrous of Humbert to start moralizing about "modern co-education" and "campfires" having depraved his beloved, but the readers should not forget that he is passionately in love with her and deeply shocked by his discovery that she is not as innocent as his Annabel was. Indeed, what H.H. (and quite possibly his creator as well) sees as depravity and deviance may be largely considered as part of more or less common development of adolescent sexuality. But we should also bear in mind that only a small minority of female children in the US lose their virginity at the age of twelve, in the 1950s or today. Eric Goldman's suggestion that Lolita is a perfectly normal child, whom the sexual aggressor and exploiter Humbert pathologizes, seems rather debatable as the critic does not seem to account for the fact that, from the beginning, Lolita was sexually interested in Humbert also and that she had already had her first experience of intercourse by that time. When Goldman argues that "Humbert's mythical framework presents Lolita as a sexual deviant who perverts a supposedly 'innocent' pedophile," he does not take into consideration Humbert's irony about American youth culture, either (Goldman 101).

Goldman suggests that "it is the Kinseyan moments in the novel (those few in which Lolita's sexual activity is seen in the context of her peers) that expose the distorting effects of Humbert's mythologizing of Lolita—moments in which the muted suggestion that Lolita is in fact 'normal' despite her sexual experiments with her peers makes Humbert Humbert's exploitation of her even more repulsive" (Goldman 102). I concur with Goldman that H.H.'s treatment of Lolita is indeed often repulsive, but for a different reason: being a conformist and a hypocrite, he fails to respect her as a woman and as a partner displaying a largely condescending, patronizing attitude to her. His "terrorizing" and blackmailing the child, as well as egotistically enjoying her sexually having stigmatized her as "My Frigid Princess," have ruined their relationship. As noted above, I think it is a mistake to classify Lolita as a "normal child"; she is, in fact, oversexed and precocious for a US twelve-year-old of the late 1940s. However, I would also stop short of presenting her as a deviant or "juvenile delinquent" (as she defines herself jokingly). Still, taking her as a complete victim, as feminist critics are wont to do, is an incomplete story; she has been prematurely sexualized, but has a way of functioning that gets her into adulthood.

It is also quite entertaining to analyze their short dialogue as Lolita prepares to manually stimulate Humbert's penis for the first time. She asks him if he has "ever done it as a kid," and we are left to wonder if she means masturbation or stimulation of another boy's penis. Nabokov was known to be rather intolerant of homosexuality, and one would assume that she means children's homoerotic rehearsal play. Humbert's blunt answer (" 'Never,' I answered quite truthfully.") reveals his uneasiness with homosexuality and/or onanism in particular and carnality issues in general. Not surprisingly, this tongue-tied presentation of their first sexual scene is followed by Humbert's (and arguably Nabokov's) assertion that he is "not concerned with so-called 'sex' at all. Anybody can imagine these elements of animality. A greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (*Lolita Annotated* 133–134). It is somewhat unclear how Humbert is going to "fix" this magic if he discards the sexual as "animality." Again, how can a relationship between a man and a woman be "physical" but "not coital"? Are not nymphets first and foremost about sex appeal, attraction, and eroticism? How can one separate the "so-called sex" from a purely esthetic enjoyment of nymphets? As we learn later in the text, the following morning Lolita and H.H., a "waif" and a "foul-smelling adult," had "strenuous intercourse three times" (*Lolita Annotated* 140). Lusting for Lolita and having a lot of intercourse with her

while at the same time denying that he is concerned with "so-called sex" reveal the essence of Humbert the Pharisee's sexual hypocrisy. In addition, as noted above, Humbert's sexual hypocrisy may have been intended by Nabokov as a hint at his "Russianness."

But the most interesting thing happens after that morning filled with Lolita's stories about the summer camp and their "strenuous intercourse": the heroine becomes suddenly very upset; she makes sad jokes about having been raped, half-jokingly threatens to call the cops, insults Humbert in all kinds of ways. . . . What has happened? An almost Kafkaesque metamorphosis? Everything seemed so fine, Lolita initiated the intercourse herself, and now she is so distressed, thinks Humbert. Arguably, what happened was not post-traumatic stress, but rather that she detected Humbert's hypocrisy when she told him about her intercourse with Charlie and realized that he is actually an egotist, a conformist and a Pharisee.[13] This is the precise moment when her budding affection for him is being destroyed, and it is Humbert, the ultimate loser, who appears to have self-destructed—perhaps to a greater degree than she had herself been destroyed, as modern Americans would see it. From this discourse logic, he did have a chance to win Lolita's love by being more sensitive to her feelings and her sexuality, but he did not take the opportunity and ultimately lost her to Quilty, who is so much more successful than he has been as a writer, intellectual—and, ultimately, as a lover too. If we assume that Humbert has implicit Russian roots (as Havelock Ellis's Ukrainian is certainly one of his prototypes), then Quilty could stand for a quintessential North American intellectual, his more successful counterpart. Knowing Nabokov's biography, one might surmise that he has implied a certain amount of self-irony in this vision. The shifting faces of Lolita herself may be similar echoes of older Russian stereotypes of precocious girls, rather than of more Victorian stereotypes of girl victims of predators.

The fact that Humbert's monomaniacal passion, or passion-love, for Lolita (as an avatar of Annabel) is by far superior to his pedophilic urges is affirmed powerfully by his visit with the Schiller family toward the end of the novel.[14] Lem comments on this scene most aptly in his review of *Lolita*:

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[13] Another thing that happens in the morning is that she sees Quilty in the hotel lobby, so this meeting may have aggravated the situation as well (*Lolita Annotated* 138–139).

[14] Trilling expresses this superiority quite well: "Psychiatry and the world may join in giving scientific or ugly names to Humbert's sexual idiosyncrasy; the novel treats of it as a condition of love like another" (Trilling 363).

> Lolita [finally] ceases being one of the many and becomes the only and irreplaceable, the invaluable one . . . even in her deformity, overripening, and decay . . . The mechanism of lust is destroyed during this brief moment . . . As the reader witnesses a synthesis of the "nymphetic" object of lust with the object of love, a subjectivization of the object of love, [this phenomenon] becomes alien to the gloomy world of the Dostoevsky characters [Lem means such characters as Stavrogin and Svidrigailov—A.L.]; it is Nabokov's property and a distinctive feature of his novel. (Lem, web resource)

While I concur with Lem that Nabokov's H.H. does break away from Dostoevsky's villains at this moment, he clearly has been constructing this character in dialogue with Dostoevsky, Kuprin, Sologub, Ilf and Petrov, G. Ivanov and other Russian authors, many of whom he has wrathfully denounced in his numerous interviews and memoirs.

Another most fascinating possible influence of a key Silver Age figure on Nabokov has been noted by Olga Skonechnaya and Aleksandr Etkind: this is Vasilii Rozanov's metaphor "moonlight people" (used to denote homosexuality) that recurs in many Nabokov's texts, from *Mary* to *Look at the Harlequins!* Nabokov's long-standing appreciative interest in his father V.D. Nabokov's pioneering liberal stance on homosexuals in the early 1900s (as Kon reminds us, the latter proposed decriminalizing homosexuality in Russia in 1902 [*The Sexual Revolution in Russia* 46]) is clearly at odds with Nabokov's obvious animosity toward his younger brother Sergei who happened to be a homosexual. The question of Rozanov's influence on Nabokov is very complex (as is Nabokov's homophobia and attitude to sexuality in general), but it is clear that it is not reducible to both authors' quaint forms of homophobia (as Etkind seems to believe). Rather, Nabokov was likely to have learned from, or shared with, Rozanov a deep intellectual curiosity in everything related to pleasurable sexuality and was keen on exploring it without traditional Russian reticence and suspiciousness (Skonechnaya 33–52, Etkind "Тайный код для заблудившегося пола" 79–87).

As H.H. repents and manages to win the sympathy of at least some readers via the acceptance of his guilt for ruining Lolita's life, one is reminded of Nabokov's image of the ape sketching the bars of his own cage. In Humbert's case, as we have seen, this cage bars consist of both his paraphilic sexuality (hebephilia) and his monomaniacal passion for Annabel. But as Nabokov engages us in a creative exercise of imagining the bars of Humbert's sexual predicament, we may learn inadvertently about the author's own contradictions and limitations in representing the sexual, the corporal and the erotic. This glimpse into Nabokov's own strategy and

ideology of the sexual, the fleshly and the bodily can again tie his most famous novel within both the main tradition of classic Russian literature restricting sexuality to ellipses, omissions and grotesqueries (which starts with Gogol and culminates in the work of such Silver Age authors as Bely, Blok or Bunin) and an alternative line of succession allowing for a more open sexual and erotic discourse (started by Pushkin and developed by Kuzmin, Sologub, Kuprin, Georgii Ivanov, and, last but not least, Nabokov himself).

Lolita-Quilty, Lolita-Humbert

Lolita is in many ways a much more enigmatic and provocative character than H.H., the reason being that female adolescent sexuality was in the 1950s, and remains to this day, a largely unexplored territory, marked heavily by persistent tropes of women as victims. Nabokov certainly understood this and did not want to provide his readers with any readymade answers or suggestions. However, as noted already, it is highly debatable that he wanted to create a typical, "normal" American "girl-child" who is treacherously seduced and depraved by a monstrous predator from the old corrupt Europe. It would be a very naïve and tendentious reading of this novel to suppose that these civilizational allegories were of any concern to this writer. He was much more interested in moving Pushkin's assumption (quoted several times above) that we can experience (or, rather, succumb to) sexual love at any age, but that in the middle age the "deathly passion's imprint is sad" (*Евгений Онегин* 201).

Some of the most characteristic readings of the novel today come from pedagogic perspectives, i.e., to what extent is this book teachable to undergrads and how one can teach it best. The character of Lolita is undoubtedly central to these pedagogic concerns. Eric Naiman, for example, lets us know that in his senior seminar

> several students have criticized Humbert—and Nabokov—for being unable to envision or represent Lolita's experience of physical pleasure in her sexual encounters with Humbert: the reality, they argue, would be more complex. This argument inevitably leads to a discussion of whether the reality of sexual abuse or statutory rape should matter for a good reading of *Lolita*, as well as to a consideration of the habitual uses of representations of female pleasure in pornographic, usually male-oriented, verbal and cinematic texts. (Kuzmanovich 41)

While I think the problem of statutory rape is only very remotely linked to this work of fiction, and it is hard for me to understand what "por-

nographic texts" Naiman considers along with *Lolita* and why he has to do so, I think his students may be quite right in questioning Nabokov's portrayal of his character's sexual behavior. Part of the problem may have been related to the fact that the writer knew very little about adolescent girls and could rely primarily on occasional observations. But one might also hypothesize that Nabokov's inability (or unwillingness?) to present Lolita's sexuality in more detail and give her more of a voice in the novel had to do with a lack of understanding of and attention to female sexuality characteristic of numerous major Russian writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Nabokov seems to have partially inherited.

Naiman's students seem to be more perceptive than Kuzmanovich's; the latter did not like the Jeremy Irons-read audiobook and complained that "despite Irons's lyrical voice . . . in his reading of Lolita's speech they hear less of her desperation than in their own readings of the passages in which she calls her relationship to H.H. 'incest' and threatens to tell the police that he 'raped' her" (Kuzmanovich 22). Irons might or might not appreciate these bits of criticism coming from US undergraduates, but it is perhaps the instructor's responsibility to explain to his students that the relationship might have had very little to do with incest or rape and that they should read the text more attentively to be able to catch several layers of irony therein: Nabokov's, the narrator's, and Lolita's. Here is the passage Kuzmanovich's students must have meant when they questioned Irons's credentials:

> "You chump," she said, sweetly smiling at me. "You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you've done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, dirty, dirty old man." (*Lolita Annotated* 141)

One can only try to imagine Irons with his "lyrical voice" trying to show some "desperation" while reading these lines.

In his recent book Naiman quotes a female student of his (perhaps, different from the one mentioned by him in the earlier article) who called the novel "misogynistic" because Nabokov "could not bring himself to represent female sexual pleasure." One may agree or disagree with the student's perceptive comment, but Naiman is certainly wrong when he goes on to claim that if Nabokov had decided to express Lolita's experiencing sexual pleasure, the novel "would risk toppling into the genre of at least soft-core pornography" (Naiman 2010, 148).[15]

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[15] I am thankful to Dr. Yuri Leving for bringing to my attention this excerpt from Naiman's book and for many other insightful comments on my discussion of *Lolita*.

Perhaps the most efficient way of approaching this problem is to start with the Lolita-Quilty relationship. Chronologically, it starts long before the Lolita-Humbert one; in addition, we know for sure from Lolita herself that Quilty was "the only man she had ever been crazy about" (*Lolita Annotated* 272).

Although Nabokov peppered the text with thinly veiled references to Quilty, this character remains rather schematic and undeveloped. It is unclear why he had cared to pursue Lolita for such a long time and had taken pains to mock H.H. in the process, if he got rid of her shortly thereafter, when she refused to take part in his filmed orgies at Duk Duk Ranch. We do know, however, that he touched her inappropriately when she was about nine, sat her in his lap, and kissed her face, which made her "furious" (*Lolita Annotated* 272). It is therefore Quilty who is the true pedophile and "pervert" of the novel, not so much Humbert, a bashful, hypocritical, sexually conservative monomaniac. To Quilty, sex is all about pleasure and experimentation; H.H. seems to always, even in his most playful, ironic mood, reduce it to its procreative function, something dull and monotonous. Quilty is obviously a hyperphile who is interested in kinky experiments and for whom there is little or nothing emotional or humane about sexual intercourse. Nabokov may have intended him to serve as a parody of American masculinity, akin to Dostoevsky's conception of his most memorable libertine, Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov,[16] as well as to emerging American media stereotypes of swingers. A major enigma of the book is why Lolita had fallen in love with him at that moment and why she kept being attracted to him throughout her life. She was, of course, a pre-pubescent child of about nine who did not have any prior experience; her mother Charlotte's flirtatious behavior may have been partly responsible for the feelings of jealousy and, ultimately, attraction to Quilty. The relations between the mother and daughter had been tight, and they seem to have always been rivals in love. In addition, Lolita seems to have

[16] The comparison of Quilty with Fyodor may appear far-fetched, but both men met their violent deaths in punishment for their lasciviousness and depravity; the former was executed by the insulted "father," whose stepdaughter he had "sodomized," while the latter was annihilated by his own illegitimate son, Smerdyakov, appalled at his biological father's godless, hedonistic lifestyle.

At the same time, as Dr. Keith Livers has pointed out to me, in Dostoevsky Smerdyakov kills Fyodor acting on Ivan's behalf. Ivan buttresses Smerdyakov's understandable dislike of Fyodor with the moral/intellectual arguments necessary to justify murder. However, there is no Ivan-like figure in the Nabokov novel, whereas one can clearly see the author's contempt for Quilty who is not only more cynical, corrupted and depraved than Humbert, but also so much more successful as an intellectual and a published author.

been attracted to males who would seem to be father figures, but there is nothing in the text pointing to her daughterly feelings toward Quilty; her attraction to him appears purely erotic. She did seem to perceive Humbert partly as a parent though, "granting" him that "he had been a good father" (*Lolita Annotated* 272).

It is also crucial for understanding the satirical element of the novel that Quilty is a celebrity, a renowned playwright. Lolita thinks he is a "genius," which is a strong, restrictive term in the Russian usage (granted only to the likes of Pushkin and Tchaikovsky, never to Chekhov or Dostoevsky), but maybe not so much in an American cultural-linguistic setting. In Lolita's words, he "saw—smiling—through everything and everybody," and that made him unlike anybody else. Quilty apparently had lied to Lo that he would take her to one of those Hollywood tryouts and she would become an actress in a movie based on his play.

Humbert actually thinks that Quilty had "sodomized" Lolita, which points to Humbert's (and his author's) homophobia rather than to what actually happened between Lo and Quilty (*Lolita Annotated* 295). It is perversely amusing that he chooses this particular term, but at the same time understandable: Lolita by then had been petted by Quilty, deflowered by Charlie, abused by Humbert himself, and now subjected to group sex by Quilty at the ranch. For Humbert, however, there is no better term than "sodomy" to describe the harm inflicted by Quilty.

In other words, all these loosely connected bits of information about Quilty lead one to think of him as a scheme, a figment of the author's imagination rather than a believable, fully drawn character. Nabokov's goal is self-evident though: he needed to introduce Quilty to counterpoint him to Humbert and allay the latter's deviance by contrasting him with a much more obvious pedophile and "pervert." In addition, he needed "Cue" to mock the North American "celebrity cult" by portraying its corrupting effects on the most vulnerable consumers of pop culture, i.e., children.

Finally, we can now try to approach the Lolita-Humbert relationship. First of all, the affection was mutual at the beginning, and Humbert did not force her into their first intercourse; it was fully consensual. Of course, we must bear in mind Lo's tender age, but in the novelistic, fictional milieu moral-legal judgments and assumptions have to be questioned, or else what do we need imaginative writing for?

Secondly, as shown above, their fragile mutual fondness is ruined not by their age difference and not even Lo's pre-existent infatuation with Quilty, but by Humbert's sexual hypocrisy and conservatism, by his resorting to blackmailing and "terrorizing" his partner instead of trying to build

a respectful relationship (*Lolita Annotated* 151). He had his chance to gain her love, but he tragically failed to take it. His self-confident belief that he was so intelligent and broad-minded, while Lolita did not live up to her I.Q. and was "mentally, a disgustingly conventional little girl," might or might not be self-deception, but in any event hardly related to his failure. His patronizing, but vulgar style of producing jokes and ponderous puns only aggravated the matter:

> Come and kiss your old man . . . and drop that moody nonsense. In former times, when I was still your dream male [he never was one: in fact, it was always Quilty!—A.L.] you swooned to records of the number one throb-and-sob idol of your coevals . . . But now, I am just your *old man*, a dream dad protecting his dream daughter . . . The rapist was Charlie Holmes; I am the therapist . . . I am your father, and I *am* speaking English, and I love you. (*Lolita Annotated* 149–150)

By choosing this tactic of dealing with Lolita, Humbert actually self-destructs and prevents the relationship from growing into a mutually affectionate one. Lolita's response of treacherously deceiving him and ultimately running away with someone who had avoided positioning himself as a father figure is therefore logical and perfectly understandable from both moral and emotional standpoints. H.H.'s prohibiting her from mixing with other adolescents was the last drop in the cup of her patience.

But it must be understood that H.H. is "in the grip of an obsessional lust" and, as a man in "passion-love," he is a "sick man, a patient" (Trilling 366, 368). Trilling makes a wonderful point when he argues that the modern idea of love is very remote from passion-love; it is thus inadequate to judge Humbert's behavior in terms of "sexual health"; and he was definitely *not* aspiring to create a "healthy family" with Lolita. But his predicament is not only about his own sexual hypocrisy; as noted above, it is also about the "sexual hypocrisy of American life" (Trilling 364). H.H. was never able to figure out how to act with Lolita partly due to the fact that she was certainly a precocious, oversexed "girl-child," whose sexuality was simultaneously restrained and stimulated by the hypocritical society.

Sarah Herbold is therefore absolutely right when she encourages her students to "articulate the paradox of Lolita's duplicity and confront head-on its confusing implications." She goes on to argue that "while Lolita can be seen as a victim, she must also be seen as a powerful agent, in whom erotic desire and creativity are as closely intertwined as they are for Humbert (and Nabokov)" (Kuzmanovich 138).

Dmitri Nabokov, in the above-quoted passage (*The Enchanter* 127), echoes Herbold as he compares Lolita with her main literary precursor—the heroine of *The Enchanter*, who is much less developed as an autonomous agent.

Indeed, since Lem's and Trilling's programmatic essays, there has not been too much criticism that dared focus on Lolita as an independent, powerful force playing a major role in the love triangle with Quilty and Humbert, having her own sexual desires and preferences, making her own choices. Herbold's essay very helpfully points toward the necessity of such critical perspectives.

Lolita *and the Legacy of the Silver Age*

One can easily see the numerous Russian sources and progenitors of the Lolita-Humbert relationship, some of which have been mentioned above (Kuprin's Sulamith and King Solomon, Sologub's Lyudmilochka and Sasha Pylnikov, Georgii Ivanov's obsessive images of lust and violence toward young girls in *The Decay of the Atom*, etc.), but one the novelty of Nabokov's approach emerges when one considered the possible cross-pollination of these Russian sources with English, French and American literary benchmarks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: from Byron, Poe and Melville to Proust and Joyce. In tandem with this cross-cultural, multi-tradition approach, he was able to incorporate into his novel a vast amount of sexological discourse that had been extremely influential at that time (such as Havelock Ellis and Alfred Kinsey). He saw that American society was getting obsessed with the "nightmare of pedophilia" and protecting itself from sex predators and aggressors, but he decided to cause a commotion by showing this phenomenon in all of its complexity, demonstrating the continuum of pedophilia on the example of two very different lovers of Lolita, Quilty and Humbert. The result is that he shocked his audiences on both sides of the Atlantic by crossing the lines of the permissible in moral-legal terms and thus in many ways anticipated subsequent studies of sexualities providing our deeper understanding of sexual attraction and allowing for certain additional possibilities whenever two consenting partners find themselves passionately attracted to one another. Books like *Lolita* thus arguably raise the cultural weight of literature as they enrich the public's awareness of such controversial social phenomena as a possibility of consensual relationships whenever one of the partners happens

to be considerably younger than the legal age of consent via representing such "illicit love" in a novelistic, fictional medium.

In addition, *Lolita* stands as one of the first endeavors of a Russian author to win the attention and sympathies of Western audiences by constructing a complex metaphoric commentary upon the condition of Western cultures. It is remarkable that in generating this commentary Nabokov relied heavily on Russian sources, both literary and extra-literary, some of which have been discussed in this chapter. It is important that in the tremendous discursive formation created around *Lolita* in the West we should be still able to discern the elements of "Russianness" in its conception and design.

Amid the tremendous amount of ink spilled over the novel that seems to have been addressed from all possible vantages by now, my approach to Nabokov's masterpiece does not lie within psychoanalytical, feminist, or "victimological" paradigms. Although I did call on a few details from Nabokov's life to make my case, I have tried to refrain from purely biographical criticism as well. My objective in this chapter was to provide sexual portraits of all major characters without downplaying the importance of the novel as a cultural commentary upon such phenomena as sexual hypocrisy of US society, its obsession with sexual deviants, European anti-Americanism, and American stereotypes about European cultures.

In addition, it was crucial for me to emphasize that all the four main characters—Lolita, Humbert, Quilty, and Charlotte—had East Slavic prototypes and predecessors, both in Nabokov's own work (such as *The Enchanter*) and in the work of the Silver Age authors he knew quite well, from Sologub and Kuprin to Ilf & Petrov and G. Ivanov. Finally, my approach is inherently inter- and trans-disciplinary as I have tried to contextualize this novel in the socio-cultural and intellectual fields of its period and beyond, arguing for a fuller understanding of outstanding literary works as not so much the products of an individual artistic genius but complex statements on what Mikhail Bakhtin would call the "last questions of being." Having been influenced—or even predetermined—by the scientific/sexological, medical, psychiatric discourses of its times, novels like *Lolita* have proved capable of impacting these very discourses in their turn upon their entering the public sphere.

In the last three chapters I have attempted to show that the consequences of epistemological explosion of the Silver Age as it released creative forces that continued to feed off its paradigms well into the twentieth

century and up to the twenty-first. Figures like Kuprin, Bunin, Nabokov and Ivanov serve as convenient examples to demonstrate this continuity of being sensitive to the corporeal, the sexual and the erotic achieved in the Silver Age through a unique synthesis of the discourses of upper and educated classes and those of the *muzhik* and his female counterpart, the city prostitute. Despite all his enthusiasm for experimentalism, Bunin happened to lean toward the more conventional strategies of burlesque and silence in his dealing with erotic and sexual themes. Conversely, authors like Kuprin and Ivanov seemed to have followed Vasilii Rozanov, a founding father of Russia's philosophy of sexualities, in looking for more modern solutions to the problem of representing the carnal and the corporeal, often drawing on both Russian and Western precursors.

These attempts to generate a genuinely Russian discourse of eroticism and sexualities culminated in Nabokov's *Lolita*, which in its turn influenced contemporary Russian writing, from the poetry of Joseph Brodsky to the novels of Vladimir Sorokin. The impact of Russia's Silver Age on subsequent attempts, especially by émigré and, much later, dissident authors, to confront traditional utopianism with anti-utopian ideologies can be detected and described using representations of the sexual and the erotic as a litmus test that allows us to determine whether a given author belongs to a utopian or anti-utopian creed. Ivanov and Nabokov (despite their mutual antipathy) created transitional literary texts, in which their "Russianness" is largely reconciled with their "Westernness" in their bold attempts at modernizing Russian literary tradition.

However, even texts like *Lolita*, seemingly open and unbiased toward the corporeal and the erotic, could still be criticized for failing to be fully receptive to sexualities as they continue to draw rather rigid lines between love and lust, sexual emotions and sexual intercourse, "perversions" and "normal" sexual behavior. The age-old Russian awkwardness and uneasiness in expressing the erotic and the corporeal can be observed even in this text written in English by a bilingual, bicultural author who went into exile at a very young age.

I will now turn to Joseph Brodsky who was Nabokov's much younger contemporary and yet another exile. I will try to establish a crucial symbolic link between the two authors and show that Brodsky may have succeeded where Nabokov had to a certain extent failed: his treatment of the sexual and carnal seems to be devoid of the above-described reticence and uneasiness.

CHAPTER SIX

JOSEPH BRODSKY'S LIBERTINAGE: SEXUAL AND EROTIC THEMES IN HIS POETRY

Помнишь скромный музей, где не раз видали
одного реалиста шедевр "Не дали"?

«Михаилу Барышникову» (1992)[1]

In this final chapter I propose to examine the poetry of Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996), one of several recent Russian authors to be charged—in Russia and elsewhere—with "obscenity," explicit erotica, "amorality," and even "pornography" in his works. I will focus specifically on several of his poems, most notably, «На смерть друга» / "To a Friend: In Memoriam" (1974) and «Посвящается Чехову» / "Homage to Chekhov" (1993), as well as touch upon the problem of representing sexualities in a literary medium and the poet's contribution to the formation of literary discourses of eroticism and corporeality. To this end, I will look at two previously unexplored sources of Brodsky's poetry: Russian criminal jargon known as *fenya* and the work of the Latin poet Catullus.

At the same time, for the thrust of this monograph it will be important to outline a parallel between Brodsky and his predecessors from the Silver Age and before: from Nikolai Leskov and Anton Chekhov to Aleksandr Blok. Yet more importantly, I will try to hint at Brodsky's place in the tradition of Russian literary anti-utopianism, from Pushkin and Yazykov to Sologub, Rozanov, Georgii Ivanov and Nabokov.

Toward the Problem of Brodsky's Use of the Russian Language

If there exists one similarity between Joseph Brodsky and Nikolai Leskov (discussed in Chapter 2), two drastically different authors from different historical periods, it is a passion for traveling that actually preceded and induced their respective literary activities. Leskov published his first story

[1] Remember a modest museum where we saw more than once // a masterpiece by one realist titled "We didn't get laid"? (*Малое собрание сочинений* 542). Translations from Brodsky's Russian are mine unless otherwise marked.

at the age of thirty, while holding a job at an affiliate of a British commercial company. The job involved a great amount of traveling throughout Russia. Similar to a US Beatnik of the 1950s, Brodsky dropped out of high school in the mid-50s and traveled extensively with geological expeditions and seasonal workers to the Far East, the Polar North and Central Asia. It is on one of these expeditions that he later claimed to have started writing poetry. In addition, both authors traveled extensively in and studied the cultures of such colonized nations as Lithuania, Poland, Moldova, etc.

Traveling is a crucial, formative factor for a Russian writer as the country (the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, or Russia of today) is enormous and linguistically heterogeneous. There is a lot of territorial variability within the Russian language today, as well as a large amount of prison/"gulag" jargons sometimes referred to as *fenya* that have penetrated into today's Russian language due to the enormous number of people who passed through the gulags during the Stalin era and subsequently, until (and after) the perestroika period. If a writer seeks to experience this linguistic richness, he/she must leave Moscow and St. Petersburg and get to know the countryside. Few have been able to appreciate this factor.

In "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," Walter Benjamin does indeed emphasize the importance of Leskov's travels at the beginning of his career: he "became acquainted with the organization of the religious sects in the country" and advanced his worldly wisdom, which later enabled him to launch a fight against "Orthodox bureaucracy" through Russian legends and, perhaps more importantly, create the images of a "righteous man," who is "seldom an ascetic, usually a simple, active man who becomes a saint apparently in the most natural way of the world . . . he prefers to stick with the sturdy nature. He sees the prototype in the man who finds his way about the world without getting too deeply involved with it" (Benjamin 85–86).

Brodsky's task as a lyric poet was quite different from that of Leskov the storyteller: he had to create his own poetic language and "manner" in the stifling conditions of a totalitarian regime. Unlike Nabokov, he was forced to leave his fatherland when he was in his mid-thirties and a renowned poet already. Living in the Soviet Union, he managed to come up with a "monstrous amalgam," to use one of his favorite word combinations, of a neo-classicist high style and the extremely profane language of part of the Russian intelligentsia, which had to, or chose to, absorb Russian prison and gulag jargon in all its variety.

The cultural/linguistic value of criminal jargons and *мат* in terms of their contribution to a discourse of sex is arguably ambivalent: on the

one hand, they are a resource of obscene and largely meaningless bawdy jocular or angry speech; on the other, they are part of the Russian language and culture and, as such, yield a wealth of linguistically productive vocabulary and terminology.[2] If used discretionally and thoughtfully in literary or even popular cultural contexts, these words and/or "terms" could potentially enrich and empower the literati, journalists, and cultural figures both linguistically and psychologically and enable them to bridge the enormous gap between crude expletives / coarse sex-related humor on the one hand and shameful, haughty, quasi-intellectual moralizing on the other.[3] Filling in this middle territory currently occupied by bashful giggles, slips of the tongue and "many different silences"[4] could be thus achieved without falling into the trap of traditional Russian mental attitudes of *glumleniye*, *yurodstvovavniye* and *payasnichaniye* / "clowning around."

This point needs to be further clarified. Quite a few late Soviet / contemporary Russian authors use a lot of erotic imagery, references to and descriptions of sex acts and/or sex-related obscenity, *мат* and criminal jargons in their work (Vladimir Sorokin comes to mind as perhaps the most vivid example). But love and affection, sexual attraction and desiring/desired body are portrayed in many of them as grotesque burlesques; the intent of these authors is often anti-sexual and anti-erotic. In what follows I will try to demonstrate that, unlike Yuri Mamleyev or Sorokin or Viktor Yerofeyev, Brodsky appears to have always aimed to treat the erotic and the corporeal without trivializing or burlesquing it.

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[2] In one of his lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault discusses confession in the seventeenth century following the "cartography of a sinful body," as the sin no longer is in the breaking of the rule of union but now it "dwells within the body itself." This cartography includes the sense of touch, sight, the tongue (dirty words), and, finally, the ears. This is how he describes the "tongue" component:

> Pleasures of the tongue are the pleasures of indecent speech and dirty words. Dirty words give pleasure to the body; nasty speech causes concupiscence or is caused by concupiscence at the level of the body. Has one uttered "dirty words" and "indecent speech" without thinking? . . . "Were they, rather, accompanied by bad thoughts? And were these thoughts accompanied by bad desires?" (*Abnormal* 188–189)

In other words, if one pushes Foucault's argument about confession mechanisms and applies it to literature, using "dirty words" inevitably brings about the development of literary discourses of eroticism and sexualities.

[3] Leo Tolstoy's association with such moralizing and his advocacy of anti-sexual, anti-erotic ideologies was, as noted in Chapter 2, all the more bizarre if one considers his own apparently strong sexual drive and frank confessions of his sexual prowess (Foucault's "pleasures of the tongue") when he spoke with friends and fellow authors.

[4] I am alluding to Foucault here, see the full quote in the *Introduction* (*History of Sexuality* 27).

Brodsky always faced accusations of obscenity, even from his admirers, during his lifetime. One such critic (moreover not a Soviet one but an émigré) was Yuri Kolker who in an otherwise complimentary essay on Brodsky lashed out on him for his "scabrous eroticism." Here I will consider briefly some examples of Brodsky's "salaciousness," according to Kolker,[5] and then move on to a close reading of several of Brodsky's poems.

Kolker's main argument is that at some point in the late 1960's Brodsky abandoned some sort of a "true lyricism" in representing sensuality and switched to "obtrusive, repulsive naturalism." Early in his essay he mentions the 1968 poem "Candlestick" as an example of the emergent disgustingness. The critic is genuinely frustrated by what he sarcastically calls Brodsky's "everyday niftiness" (Kolker 119): how can a poet spoil philosophic verse with two references to male genitalia in a non-erotic poem? Let us briefly examine the poem itself to see if Brodsky's use of sexual references is indeed excessive.

The poem concerns a bronze satyr, an element of the candlestick. In the first stanza Brodsky remarks that there is green oxide in the satyr's

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[5] It is beside my argument whether Kolker is a major or minor critic of Brodsky's oeuvre. I am using his criticisms as typical of a fairly common stance on Brodsky in Russia and elsewhere when he is charged with overusing "obscenities" and "elements of pornography" in his poetry.

Another bilious critic of Brodsky's professed vulgarity in representing sexuality is Eduard Limonov, his younger contemporary and self-proclaimed literary rival. In his "venomous observations" on Brodsky's poetry, Limonov argues that Brodsky knows how to "manipulate the universe, God, and cosmos" but fails to deal with "human beings":

> There are very few women in his poems (sic!) who are either totally inaccessible, and he is afraid of them [. . .], or very accessible, and then they are prosaic in a vulgar way (*до вульгарности приземлены*). Brodsky doesn't know how to behave in the moments of intimacy: trying to be free and manly, he suddenly curses dirtily. From the lips of an almost refined intellectual, a *man of letters*, that he wants to be (and obviously 75% is), curse words, attempts to introduce low-style expressions like "entered [her] doggy-style" (*ставил раком*) sound trivial and vulgar (*пошло и вульгарно*). God, whom Brodsky mentions so often, did not give him the gift of love poetry (*дара любовной лирики*); he is gross (*груб*) whenever he tries to be intimate. («Поэт-бухгалтер», web source)

While I do not think that Limonov's remarks help us understand Brodsky's "love poetry" in any way, they certainly reveal that he bitterly envies the poet his accomplishments (as was the case with Tsvetayeva versus the so-called boulevard novel of the Silver Age, there can be no meaningful, full-fledged comparison of these two authors of vastly different literary achievement and artistic merit). The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that critics like Limonov and Kolker misinterpret Brodsky's alleged "vulgarity" and crudeness failing to see the role of "low-style expressions" in his poetics.

scrotum (*в его мошонке зеленеет окись*), which is intended as an ironic comment on all kinds of male "possessiveness": he is holding the candelabrum in his hand, but the official description of this exhibit (the candlestick) states that it is he who belongs to the candlestick, not vice versa. Then in the third stanza, amid the lively imagery of life and death, blurred boundaries between the animate and inanimate, the poet again brings up genitalia: «Шагнув за Рубикон, он затвердел от пейс до гениталий» / "Having crossed the Rubicon, [the satyr] stiffened from his *peyoths* [Jewish side-locks] to the genitals" (*Избранные стихотворения* 108–109).

It is unclear how Kolker would like the poet to express the rich allusiveness and intricate web of meanings of masculinity in this poem without mentioning the most obvious point of reference in a satyr—his sexual prowess and genitals. What may seem nasty and inadmissible to some readers of the poem has nothing to do with obscenity and/or pornography but is organically woven into the texture of the beautifully philosophic lyric. After all, how can one write a good poem about male sexuality without referring or alluding to male genitals, including the scrotum and other "obscene" parts of the male body?

Another example of scabrousness in Kolker's view is the following lines from the poem «Конец прекрасной эпохи» / "The End of a Beautiful Era" (1969):

> Жить в эпоху свершений, имея возвышенный нрав,
> к сожалению, трудно. Красавице платье задрав,
> видишь то, что искал, а не новые дивные дивы.
> И не то чтобы здесь Лобачевского твердо блюдут,
> но раздвинутый мир должен где-то сужаться, и тут—
> тут конец перспективы.
>
> To live in the epoch of great accomplishments if you have an elevated temper
> is unfortunately hard. Having lifted a beauty's dress,
> you see what you've looked for, not some new and wonderful wonders.
> And not that they would be observing Lobachevsky too strictly here,
> but the pulled apart world must somewhere get narrow, and here
> we have the end of the perspective" (*Избранные стихотворения* 178).

The entire poem is extremely melancholy and ironic; it commingles allusions to Russia's history and the Bible with the profane and vulgar jargon of the Russian intelligentsia, a considerable part of which had to go through Stalin's prisons and camps and whose language is no longer lofty and refined. Brodsky was thirty-two when he was forced out of the Soviet Union in 1972, and, once his formative years were spent in Petersburg, his

system of linguistic and cultural values, so to speak, is obviously quite different from a person who grew up in the US or Western Europe.[6]

I suggest these references to sexuality and corporeality are not overused by Brodsky: he employs them only when they are essential to the concept and plot of a poem. Even Kolker, for all his puritanical enthusiasm, finds merely a handful of examples in all of the author's poetry. One should consider Philip Larkin, another accomplished poet of the twentieth century (whom Brodsky admired), in whom one finds several references to genitals and illicit sexual desires (but his work is not typically characterized as "obsessively naturalistic"). Russian literature has often been charged with carrying out some sort of a historical mission and being pure and uncontaminated by references to sex and genitals. Brodsky was, of course, aware of a rich tradition of eroticism and "bodily needs" as portrayed in world poetry before him and appeared to have set himself the task of enriching Russian poetry with this previously absent element.

The last example I will consider is found in a 1976 poem dedicated to Mikhail Baryshnikov. The poem is about attending a ballet performance. Brodsky is describing the impressions of a spectator:

> В имперский мягкий плюш мы втискиваем зад,
> и, крылышкуя скорописью ляжек,
> красавица, с которою не ляжешь,
> одним прыжком выпархивает в сад.
>
> Into the imperial soft plush [of chairs] we squeeze our butts,
> and flapping the wings of the cursive of her thighs,
> a beauty with whom you will never lie,
> flits into the garden in one leap
> (*Избранные стихотворения* 272–273).[7]

Brodsky's supreme irony and poetic precision would have been unattainable in this lyric, which is written in the tone of a familiar friendly conversation with Baryshnikov, without this self-ironic reference to male sexual desire toward the ballerina. It is difficult to see anything scabrous or pornographic about these examples: they all seem to testify exactly

[6] It should be noted that there is a lot of critical work on Brodsky that is markedly different from Kolker's and is in fact close to the general argument of this chapter. One such critic is Mikhail Kreps (*O poezii Iosifa Brodskogo* and other works): he is also an object of Kolker's criticism as someone who tries to explain that pretty much all contemporary poetry builds on commingling the lofty and sublime with the mundane and vulgar.

[7] In Russian slang, "to lie with a woman" euphemistically implies having sex with her. A "beauty" is Brodsky's recurrent ironic way of referring to an attractive woman. See below for a parallel with Catullus.

to the opposite. Brodsky has always used sexual and erotic references in moderation and in highly ironic contexts.

Brodsky's unique (and largely unappreciated) achievement in Russian belles-lettres can be described as follows: he has managed to produce a postmodern discourse of sexuality based on linguistic/dialectal eclecticism and a patchwork of carefully crafted elements of both high and low styles and (sub)cultures. Let us first discuss a possible highbrow source of his poetry and then move on to examine how it was informed by Soviet Russia's low subcultures, including the criminal one.

Brodsky and Catullus: Toward a Possible Kinship of the Two Poetics

The most often-quoted source of eroticism in Brodsky is the Golden Age of Latin poetry, which he knew very well and which influenced his poetics in a variety of ways. Most of these influences (Ovid, Horace, Propertius, Virgil, etc.) have been thoroughly studied by Brodsky scholars both in Russia and the West,[8] but I would like to briefly point to Catullus (c. 84–54 BC) whose poetry can be characterized as having a "light touch" in representing his own priapic concupiscence, obsession with hetero- and homoeroticism, as well as all sorts of bodily excesses, such as (over) eating and drinking.

Whenever Catullus writes about sexual "perversions" and uses obscene terms, he makes those look and sound natural, as if the "deviant" acts he describes were absolutely normal and permissible. He seems to ignore altogether, in other words, the moral-legal implications of having the "dirty mind" of a libertine. This is why his poems almost invariably include insulting and scabrous references to women and men, young boys and young girls alike. Catullus's strategy is to balance all these torrents of obscenities and sociopathic invectives with a humorous, jocular tone, as if he thought being vulgar and nasty could be somehow redeemed by being witty. At the same time, it is to his credit that he never shies away from the corporeal needs and always generously compliments his own and other people's sexual energy.

[8] For studies of Brodsky's dialogues with Propertius and Virgil, see, for example, Paola Cotta Ramussino «Бродский и Проперций: в поиске контекста» and Tatiana Funtusova «Бродский и Вергилий: диалог в эклогах» (Polukhina 312–327).

Some of Catullus's poems are actually presented as mocking pieces of advice to his friends and foes, but these are invariably related to sexual behavior and corporeality:

> So don't be surprised when no women want you,
> Rufus. Cover up your tender thighs. It's not
> That you don't try to loosen girls with gifts
> Or delicate crystal stones. It's this
> Horrible rumor that haunts you—how you carry this
> Ferocious goat stench in the depths of your armpits.
> Everyone's petrified of it. And it's no wonder. It's
> A horrible beast and not for any pretty girl to lie with.
> So either kill that carcass pestilent stench
> Or stop being surprised when the girls fly away (Catullus 115).

Some of Catullus's references to women and sexual intercourse echo those recurrent in Brodsky's work: *pretty girl* vs. *красавица*; *lie with* (*a pretty girl*) / *лечь с красавицей*. More importantly, however, Brodsky seems to have inherited his predecessor's ability to present the jocular berating of a friend for a lack of bodily hygiene as something evidently normal and natural, sounding like a wise tip from a more experienced man. The obvious difference, however, is that Brodsky's mind is certainly not as "dirty" as Catullus's and he often shies away from most obscene images that are replete in the Latin poet's oeuvre; for example, the Russian poet might have been embarrassed by the latter's playful homosexuality (there are not many homoerotic references or even overtones in Brodsky's work):

> This is hilarious Cato. It's really funny!
> Listen to this and cackle.
> Laugh Cato, like you love Catullus!
> This is hilarious. This is too funny.
> Just now I grabbed this boy who was ramming
> his girlfriend (and I hope this pleases Venus)—
> so I plugged him just as hard (Catullus 68).

Quite often in his late poetry, however, Brodsky does reach the heights of scabrousness and profanity a la Catullus. In "Piazza Mattei" (1981), the narrator complains about the playful Michelina who was unfaithful to him with an aristocrat referred to as The Count; his invectives toward Michelina are reminiscent of Catullus's wrath at his muse Lesbia's unfaithfulness, a leitmotif going through many of his poems:

> Граф выиграл, до клубнички лаком,
> в игре без правил.

Он ставит Микелину раком,
как прежде ставил.

Я тоже, впрочем, не в накладе:
и в Риме тоже
теперь есть место крикнуть "Бляди!,"
вздохнуть "О Боже." [. . .]
(*Форма времени* 77).

The Count won, getting there through his gloss,
In this game without rules.
He enters Michelina doggy-style,
Just as he used to do.

I am not down either though.
And now in Rome as well
One can find a place to yell, "Damned whores!"
And sigh, "Oh, Gosh!"

In "Roman Elegies" (1981), he refers to Catullus somewhat disparagingly, using his name as a common noun, not even capitalizing it, but he also mentions Lesbia, the addressee of many of Catullus's poems:

Лесбия, Юлия, Цинтия, Ливия, Микелина.
Бюст, причинное место, бедра, колечки ворса.
Обожженная небом, мягкая в пальцах глина—
плоть, принявшая вечность как анонимность торса.
Вы—источник бессмертья: знавшие вас нагими
сами стали катуллом, статуями, трояном,
августом и другими. Временные богини!
Вам приятнее верить, нежели постоянным.
Славься, круглый живот, лядвие с нежной кожей!
(*Форма времени* 100)

Lesbia, Julia, Cynthia, Livia, Michelina.
Bosoms, ringlets of fleece: for effects, and for causes also.
Heaven-baked clay, fingertips' brave arena.
Flesh that renders eternity an anonymous torso.
You breed immortals: those who have seen you bare,
They, too, turned Catulluses, statues, heavy
Neros, et cetera. Short-term goddesses! You are
Much more a joy to believe in than a permanent bevy.
Hail, the smooth abdomen, thighs as their hamstrings tighten.
(*Collected Poems in English* 278).

One notices Catullus's influence in a poem by Brodsky devoted to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, "Verses about the 1980 Winter Campaign" (1980): "Убийство—наивная форма смерти / тавтология, ария попугая, /

дело рук, как правило, цепкой бровью / муху жизни ловящей в своих прицелах / молодежи, знакомой с кровью / понаслышке или по ломке целок" (*Форма времени* 83)[9] or in «Представление» / "The Performance" (1986), a burlesque-style satirical jab at Russia's literary giants of the nineteenth century peppered with some of the most obscene popular sayings of the Brezhnev period: "'Харкнул в суп, чтоб скрыть досаду'. / 'Я с ним рядом срать не сяду.' / 'А моя, как та мадонна, / не желает без гондона'" (*Форма времени* 83).

It is important to emphasize that this chapter is not about the use of substandard language (such as *мат*) and criminal and convict jargons by the Soviet/Russian intelligentsia. Rather, I am interested in exploring Brodsky's libertinism in expressing the sexual and the erotic; he seems to have used *мат* and *феня* terms only when they were absolutely necessary and essential to the concept of a given poem. It happens that in the concept, or message, of most texts mentioned in this chapter had to do with the erotic and the sexual. In other words, I am interested in these argots only insofar as they are used by Brodsky to make his contribution to creating a modernized Russian literary language of sexuality and eroticism.

At the same time, Brodsky's affinity with Catullus lies in what can be termed intellectual, or poetic, *rowdyism*: both poets appear to be prepared to make use of obscenities and profanity simply out of pure mischief. However, they are also guided by a genuine desire to create a poetics of libertinage, to find a way to verbalize sexual desire or energy without being squeamish or bashful.

Catullus was known to quite a few Russian poets before Brodsky (both Pushkin and Fet translated some of his less sexually explicit poems), but perhaps the most interesting admirer of his poetry was Aleksandr Blok who wrote the essay "Catiline: A Page from the History of World Revolution," which contains a discussion of Catullus's enigmatic poem about Attis (# 63) and Ibsen's 1850 play, in 1919. Needless to say, despite all the obvious continuity between Silver Age sensitivities and Brodsky's poetics, Blok's take on Catullus (whom he dubs as none other than the "Latin Pushkin") is strikingly different. He blames Catullus for being afraid of his own allegoric creation—the castrate Attis (according to Blok, none other than the rebellious Catiline presented in the Aesopian language) who emasculates himself with a stone knife at the beginning of the poem.

[9] Indeed, how else would Brodsky have arrived at the shocking simile limiting the young soldiers' lack of experience with blood to deflowering their female mates back in the Soviet Union?

After that, he feels elation and lightness in his body; his feelings are akin to the way members of the Russian sect of castrates—the aforementioned Skoptsy—expressed their feelings after removing their genitals. According to Blok, this act is what makes Attis / Catiline (a patrician who unsuccessfully conspired to dethrone Emperor Sulla in 63 BC) symbolically akin to the Bolsheviks; Blok calls Catiline the "Roman Bolshevik," although he is careful to put the latter word in parentheses. Following Fyodorov and Solovyov, Blok believed in the emergence of a sexless world order, in which the coitus itself will be abolished and replaced with some sort of spiritual communication between what used to be man and woman.

These ideas may seem obsolete today, but it is quite remarkable that Brodsky was clearly among those post-Silver Age Russian writers and thinkers who firmly opposed this utopian vision held by many Russian philosophers and literati at the turn of the century. In his anti-utopianism and acceptance of the carnal and the corporeal, he is arguably a follower of such figures as Rozanov, Mandelshtam, Kuprin, Zamyatin, Georgii Ivanov, and Nabokov, many of whom have been dwelt upon in the previous chapters. His deep-seated elemental resistance to Russian utopianism was already conspicuous in his early work; although the poet seldom wrote explicitly political or social criticism (he was hardly a dissident), he was viciously and consistently attacked by the Soviet regime in the 1960s before eventually being forced into emigration in 1973. It remains somewhat of an enigma why the authorities hated Brodsky so passionately, but his openness to representing sexuality and powerful, albeit elemental, anti-utopianism may have caused this unbridled hatred of the poet by communist ideologues. I am not trying to explain why Brodsky was hated and attacked by the Communist authorities (it was probably a matter of a constellation of several factors), but his linguistic and intellectual openness to the sexual and erotic (his "libertinism," in other words) was, I believe, an irritant for his censors.

Just like Catullus two millennia before him, Brodsky was able to freely play with obscenities and profanities in his work; just like his Russian Silver Age forerunners, he appears to have always maintained a unique fascination with the jargon and subcultures of common people combined with his highbrow reading in Greek, Latin, British, Polish or North American poetry.[10]

[10] Blok's Catiline essay and its sources (Catullus, Ibsen, etc.) are discussed at length by Aleksandr Etkind (*Содом и Психея* 59–139).

Genital Allusions in "To a Friend"

"To a Friend: In Memoriam" (1973) was written in response to a false report of the death of a Moscow fellow poet. It was subsequently translated into English by Brodsky himself for the *The New Yorker* in 1985. The translation, however, does not appear as complex and intricate as the Russian original: in translating his own work, Brodsky aimed at retaining rhyme at all costs. In one of his interviews he mocks Nabokov's work on *Eugene Onegin* for its unreadable and unnecessary complexity. As we will see in the cases of both poems considered here, the poet may well have jumped to conclusions on the matter.

The whole poem will not be analyzed here: what concern my argument are only 2–3 lines but I will quote the English translation of the initial several stanzas to provide context:

> Имяреку, тебе,—потому что не станет за труд
> из-под камня тебя раздобыть—от меня, анонима,
> как по тем же делам, потому что и с камня сотрут,
> так и в силу того, что я сверху и, камня помимо,
> чересчур далеко, чтоб тебе различать голоса—
> НА ЭЗОПОВО Й ФЕНЕ в отечестве белых головок,
> ГДЕ НА ОЩУПЬ И СЛУХ НАКОЛОЛ ТЫ СВОИ ПОЛЮСА
> В МОКРОМ КОСМОСЕ ЗЛЫХ КОРОЛЬКОВ И ВИЗГЛИВЫХ СИПОВОК . . . (*Малое собрание сочинений* 223. Emphasis added)

> It's for you whose name's better omitted—since for them it's no arduous task
> to produce you from under the slab—from one more *inconnu*: me, well, partly
> for the same earthly reasons, since they'll scrub you as well off the cask,
> and because I'm up here and, frankly, apart from this paltry
> talk of slabs, am too distant for you to distinguish a voice,
> AN AESOPIAN CHANT, in that homeland of bottle-struck livers,
> WHERE YOU FINGERED YOUR COURSE TO THE POLE IN THE MOIST UNIVERSE
> OF MEAN, BLABBERING SQUINCHERS AND WHISPERING, INNOCENT BEAVERS . . .
> (*Collected Poems in English* 212. Emphasis added)

The notes at the end of the Farrar edition are quite laconic (to the point of merely further confusing the English-language reader): "Aesopian chant" is a "conversation in riddles to elude informers"; "squinchers" and "beavers" stand for Russian "korol'kov and sipovok, criminal jargon for female sex organs" (*Collected Poems in English* 517–518).

"Aesopian chant" in Brodsky's original is *Эзопова феня*: the aforementioned *fenya* has nothing to do with chanting whatsoever. It is a generic

name for the argots of Russian thieves and a general point of reference to criminal and/or gulag jargons. *Корольки* and *сиповки* are *fenya* classification terms for women with normal and "narrow" perinea respectively, i.e., while *сиповка* refers to a short distance between the anus and vaginal entrance, *королёк* implies a normal distance. In the criminal subculture it is assumed that *корольки* are "mean" (as they know what they are worth as ideal coital partners and are therefore full of self-conceit) and *сиповки* for some reason are squeaky (in Brodsky's original, literally, "squeaky sipovki").

What we observe here is a rude distortion of the Russian original. Whose fault is it? On the one hand, Brodsky had never studied the English language systematically and it is not surprising that he could confuse *chant* with *cant* and be in general not the best translator of his own work. Furthermore, in the twelve intervening years between writing and translating the poem Brodsky might well have forgotten what these *fenya* terms represented (it is often difficult for an emigrant to remember such minor details). On the other hand, there are the editors of the Farrar volume whose admiration for the poet is ill informed and ultimately counterproductive for his legacy, as he may simply be understood as a "literary pornographer." Poems like this one require extensive cultural-literary commentary and adequate, professional translations (as in a critical edition) if one is to publish them in English.

The next question these lines raise is, of course, why would *sipovki* and *korol'ki* be situated "in the moist universe" / *в мокром космосе*. Again, "universe" is not the best translation since the word "kosmos" in ancient Greek meant some sort of order or harmony. Therefore, if translated correctly and supplied with commentary, this stanza from "To a Friend" will be interpreted as it should be: Brodsky is pointing to the ancient roots of the "moist kosmos," associating female genitals (vagina) with a cave, which is simultaneously a cosmos.[11]

[11] Aleksei Losev points to the Greeks' equation of a cave with cosmos, quoting Proclus and Porfirius: "Certain texts tell us that understanding the cave as cosmos was not alien to the Greeks . . . Summarizing the Greeks' experience, Neoplatonist Proclus wrote: 'The ancients referred to cosmos as a cave.' Cosmos had been treated by the ancients as a cave for a long time. But it was Porfirius who expressed it most vividly . . . this is not an accident or some sort of an internal poetic metaphor . . . In Porfirius, it is underscored that this is a result of Athena's cosmic wisdom, while the function of this goddess's wisdom not only embraces the whole earth, but also acts jointly with fate" (*История античной эстетики. Последние века* 100, 109).

This brings to mind Leopold Bloom's vision possibly reflecting his fear of death from Joyce's *Ulysses*:

> Vulcanic lake, the dead sea: no fish, weedless, sunk deep in the earth. A dead sea in a dead land, grey and old. Old now. It bore the oldest, the first race. The oldest people. Wandered far away over all the earth, captivity to captivity, multiplying, dying, being born everywhere. It lay there now. Now it could bear no more. *Dead: an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world.*
> Desolation.
> Grey horror seared his flesh . . . (Joyce 61)

For Brodsky, this ordered universe of female genitals (as Nikolai Shchitov has pointed out to me, in the Far East it is actually a triad—there exist *sinyavki* too)[12] might also mean a symbolic and highly ironic extension of a well-known metaphor expressed in the Russian *мат: мы все в пизде* / "we are all in the cunt"—meaning that the Soviet Union's "endless deadlock" is truly hopeless. Therefore it now becomes clear why the poet ironically refers to *феня* as being Aesopian: it is indeed highly allegorical.

Apart from elaborating a habitual juxtaposition of Eros and Thanatos, sexuality and death, Brodsky appears to be creating an alternative world—or, as it were, an underworld—of sensuality and eroticism, deliberately posited at the border of high poetry with the obscene and the lowbrow: poetry becomes an intellectual loophole into this scrupulously ordered universe. Surprisingly for a Russian poet, Brodsky's fictional world is not only devoid of sexophobia: it is, in fact, constructed around a profoundly sympathetic, laudatory vision of sexuality. In this regard (as in many others), Brodsky's work is of course one of the most significant contributions of Russia to world literature in the second half of the twentieth century.

Anatomizing Anton Chekhov

Brodsky's late poem "Homage to Chekhov" (1993) was allegedly translated into English under the poet's supervision but, again, as in the case with "To a Friend," the determination to keep the meter and rhyme at all costs

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[12] *Синявка* stands for a woman with a "high perineum," i.e., a large distance between anus and vaginal entrance. Brodsky was undoubtedly familiar with this third type, as he traveled extensively in the Far East, and it remains an enigma why he did not mention it in the poem. As ever, I am thankful to Nikolai Shchitov's insights that have been so helpful in formulating these remarks on Brodsky.

in tandem with the editors being unable to accompany the text with some cultural and critical commentary resulted in publishing an English-language version that would hardly make much sense to readers.

Why did Brodsky choose to write a jocular poem about Chekhov? He was reported to be polemicizing with critics who repeatedly found "Chekhovian lyricism" in Brodsky's poetry (Akhapkin, web source). This is irrelevant for my purposes here, just as another critic's argument that the poet was disgusted by Chekhov because he was an "heir" of Akhmatova, Mandelshtam and Tsvetayeva (who all hated Chekhov) appears to me simply too superficial and irrelevant to the poem. Finally, I find it hard to believe, along with Andrei Stepanov, that Brodsky saw it as some sort of a "competition" with Chekhov and evidence of a surreptitious or even subconscious reverence for the latter (Stepanov, web source).

"Homage to Chekhov" recreates a microcosm of Chekhov's plays in accordance with a template familiar to his readers: six male characters, three female; the "chronotope" of a lakeside summer cottage in twilight; everybody is suffering from boredom and playing cards, etc. It is obvious from the initial lines that Brodsky's tone is humorous and his main intent is parody:

> Закат, покидая веранду, задерживается на самоваре.
> Но чай остыл или выпит; в блюдце с вареньем—муха.
> И тяжелый шиньон очень к лицу Варваре
> Андреевне, в профиль—особенно. Крахмальная блузка глухо
> застегнута у подбородка. В кресле, с погасшей трубкой,
> Вяльцев шуршит газетой с речью Недоброво.
> У Варвары Андреевны под шелестящей юбкой
> ни-че-го. (*Малое собрание сочинений* 566)

> Sunset clings to the samovar, abandoning the veranda,
> but the tea has gone cold, or is finished; a fly scales a saucer's *dolce*.[13]
> And the heavy chignon makes Varvara look grander
> than ever. Her starched cotton blouse is staunchly
> buttoned up to her chin. Vialtsev, deep in his chair, is nodding
> over the rustling weekly with Dubrovo's latest swing
> at the Cabinet. Varvara Andreevna under her skirts wears not a
> thing (*Collected Poems in English* 428).

[13] This is a very bizarre translation indeed: Brodsky's line literally means "a fly is stuck in the saucer with jam." Flies are, in fact, sometimes associated with voluptuousness in Russian slang. Ranchin (Ranchin 428–442) and other critics appear to have ignored this as a possible interpretation of the fly motif in the poem.

The last two lines are crucial for understanding the poem: to be more exact in translation, Brodsky says that "under Varvara's rustling skirt there is no-thing / *ни-че-го*". This statement is ambiguous: it implies both that she may have no underwear (reflected in the Farrar translation) and that she maybe a sexless creature like a US Barbie doll, i.e., she has no genitals under her skirt. The latter implication is ignored by the English translation.

This is precisely what the critics of Brodsky tend to underplay or miss altogether: the poem is largely a satire of Russian literature (not necessarily only Chekhov) for being sexually repressed and repressive; it could be read as a literary joke, almost an epigram. Erlikh, one of the characters, is very much akin to T.S. Eliot's Alfred Prufrock in his existential indecisiveness, pathetic erotic reveries and petty impulses: "Can the doctor be asked about this little boil [on Erlikh's body—A. L.]? / Perhaps eventually" (*Collected Poems in English.* 428; Eliot 1–9).

"Homage to Chekhov" is aptly analyzed by Andrei Ranchin who focuses on the motif of the fly and on the shocking "obscenities" in the text, especially on Erlikh's scene *в дощатом сортире / in a wooden john*. The critic juxtaposes it with Bloom's defecation in Joyce's *Ulysses*, which may be a little far-fetched. Brodsky's poem ends with an explicit reference to the *космос* referred to in "In Memoriam":

> Студент, расстегнув тужурку, упрекает министров в косности.
> В провинции тоже никто никому не дает.
> Как в космосе.
>
> Having unbuttoned his jacket, the student accuses the ministers of inertness.
> In the provinces, too, nobody's getting laid,
> Just as in the cosmos. (*Малое собрание сочинений* 567)

What is the central idea, or "message," of this poem? Brodsky is clearly arguing that Chekhov does not allow any emotionally healthy and rewarding erotic or sexual relationships or experiences into his works. Erlich's erotic reveries so plentiful in the poem all stem from the idleness and languor of the Russian upper classes' way of life: in other words, repressed sexuality becomes a vehicle for portraying the apathetic impotence of Chekhov's characters. It is thus incorrect to argue that Brodsky was subconsciously fearful of Chekhov as a "stronger poet": "Homage to Chekhov" is in a certain sense *not* about Chekhov at all but, rather, appears to be Brodsky's well-calculated incisive criticism of the sexlessness and anti-eroticism of Russian literature, a mockery of the dull schemata of its plots,

the cartoon-like psychological primitiveness of its characters who all seem to be predictable clones of the superimposed, pre-existent model—just like the "eternal student" MAXIMOV in Brodsky appears to Stepanov to be an amalgam of the proletarian writer MAXIM Gorky and Petya Trofimov of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*.[14]

"Homage to Chekhov" is a virtuoso travesty of Russian literature; it is an anatomy (a miniature Menippean satire) of morbid mental attitudes to sexuality embedded therein. These attitudes and values were fundamentally alien to Brodsky who had set himself the task of estranging himself from the Russian intellectual tradition of the anti-corporeal and anti-sexual, to break free from the grip of Gogol, Chekhov or Dostoevsky's strategy of silencing and/or burlesquing human sexualities.[15] Brodsky's traveling with geologists in his teens, his genuine interest in Polish and Lithuanian languages and cultures in his twenties and thirties and, finally, his lifelong almost Nabokovian or Borgesian *Anglomania* are all manifestations of not just a Mandelshtamian "yearning for Western culture" but of his intellectual freedom from the confines of Russian literary history—indeed, to paraphrase Joyce, a nightmare, from which Brodsky so successfully managed to awake.

Amongst Brodsky's most significant contributions to Russian letters is his role in developing Russian literary *libertinage*. As argued in the preceding chapters, this subtradition of socio-political and sexual freethinking began (largely overlapping with the evolution of anti-utopianism in Russia's intellectual history) in the Golden Age with Pushkin (and some lesser poets like Yazykov and Kukhelbeker), evolved through the work of Nikolai Leskov and blossomed in the late Silver Age period, especially thanks to the influence of Vassily Rozanov's philosophy of sexualities. Brodsky's openness to representing the carnal and the corporeal was inherited not only from the French- or English-language traditions, some of which he had studied thoroughly, but also from his Russian progenitors, of Golden Age

[14] See Ranchin's chapter on "Homage to Chekhov": the critic analyzes the poem in detail and arrives at similar conclusions, although his focus is not on the discourse of corporeality and eroticism (Ranchin 428–442).

[15] The oeuvres of Chekhov and Tolstoy and their impact upon subsequent decades of writing were discussed above, mostly in Chapter 2. These authors' failure to produce "Russian libertinage," i.e., sexual freethinking combined with socio-political freethinking, has been noted by some critics, e.g., by the aforementioned Georges Nivat (Nivat, web source).

and pre- and post-Silver Age, such as Pushkin, Leskov, Rozanov, Kuprin, Sologub, Khodasevich, Mandelshtam, Georgii Ivanov, and Nabokov. But his interest in representing sexual and erotic matters was clearly supported by his knowledge of such predecessors as Catullus and of Russian criminal argot known as *феня*.

CONCLUSION

RUSSIA'S "THRESHOLD OF MODERNITY" AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF SEXUALITY IN THE ERA OF BIO-POWER

In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* Michel Foucault describes a tectonic shift in the socio-cultural and political significance of the body that the Western world experienced right after the French revolution. He associates this shift with the emergence of the era of *bio-power*:

> The bio-power was . . . an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes [. . .]
>
> Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life . . . For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence . . . Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings . . . If one could apply the term *bio-history* to the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another, one would have to speak of *bio-power* to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life . . . What might be called a society's "threshold of modernity" has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. (*The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. 140–143)

It is of course an open (and difficult) question, to what extent Foucault's theory of bio-power applies to the East European borderlands and Russia. How does one locate and describe the "threshold of modernity" determined by the advent of biopower in these countries? Is this just a matter of a culture lag between Western and Eastern Europe, or is Russia so non-European as to being able to embark on its own path to modernity and thus approach its own "threshold of modernity"? And how does the concept of biopower work for exiles and for countries like Russia whose societies underwent radical transformations?

While Foucault's "Western man" was able to achieve this sort of value attached to his life, to his body and to his health (including sexual health), Russians seem to have never experienced this shift in the sense Foucault

describes it. The development of Russian capitalism in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries was cut short by the 1917 Revolution and the Soviet experiment. Given Russia's suffering in World War II on top of that, one can safely assume that "death" and fear of physical destruction indeed have remained the essence of political power of Soviet and Russian leaders, from Lenin and Stalin to Putin and Medvedev, over Russia's "legal subjects," rather than any abstract or even physically habituated mechanisms of "biopower" that would take individual or collective human life into consideration.

And with this, my manuscript comes full-circle, to join discourse back with historical circumstance itself. Modernizing discourses of the corporeal and sexual nascent in the Silver Age were brutally suppressed or hypocritically distorted in the Soviet Union, but, as I have shown, developed to some degree in the émigré writing, culminating in such landmark literary texts as Georgii Ivanov's *The Decay of the Atom* and Nabokov's *Lolita*. This is thus the challenge that my work has issued to Russian literary history: to redraw itself in light of émigré writers and writing, and in light of a textual legacy that persisted often *in opposition to* or *outside of* the Russian biopolitical sphere. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, as I have shown in Chapter 6, these resources available within Russian discourse traditions for creating a more balanced treatment of eroticism and sexualities were beginning to resurface, as the largely artificial biopolitical regime of the Soviet era yielded to other visions of Russian tradition, as reflected in the late poetry of Joseph Brodsky. Today, however, as I plan to show elsewhere, in much of Russian *belles-lettres* the strategies of burlesque grotesques seem to prevail again, as in most works by such outstanding authors as Yuri Mamleyev, Viktor Yerofeyev, Vladimir Sorokin, and Viktor Pelevin, perhaps due to their (over)reaction to the Soviet system's known Puritanism.

The results of my investigation into the discursive phenomenon of the body and the sexual, through which representations of class and identity are played out as the narratives implicating individual lives, have hopefully shed light on the specific character of the birth of Russian modern literature and on its position within world literature. I have tried to avoid exoticizing, or othering, Russia's intellectual history of the Silver Age period. Instead, I argued that it set its own course on the basis of a unique synthesis of modernizing tendencies taking some reference points from the West and all sorts of forces resisting Westernization that had already operated in the pre-revolutionary era—this study argues in its own way that Russian intellectuals were self-consciously aware of their nation's challenges

in modernization, but by no means without indigenous resources to take up those projects. This monograph has therefore made a contribution to both Russian studies (history, literary and intellectual history focused on the Silver Age) and comparative literary and cultural studies.

As I discussed such important Silver Age authors as Vasilii Rozanov, Fyodor Sologub and Mikhail Kuzmin (among many others), I relied heavily not only on the primary texts, but the crucial secondary sources produced by both Russian and Western critics and historians of the period, including Eric Naiman, Laura Engelstein, Olga Matich, Aleksandr Etkind, Dmitrii Galkovsky and many others. While my approach is different from theirs in that it combines literary studies with the history of ideas and history of medicine and science and does not rest on a mechanistic application of Western critical theory, gender and queer studies to Russia's historical and cultural realities of the past and present, I hope I have contributed to the ongoing scholarly dialogue on one of the most intriguing periods of Russian intellectual history, especially the sometimes "lost" interwar period, whose legacy has still not found its proper place because it was scattered between indigenous and émigré intellectuals.

My research findings are arguably of interdisciplinary importance and relevance. Via bringing in such largely "non-literary" thinkers as Cesare Lombroso, Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey and John Money as crucial reference points for the Russian authors I treat here, throughout the six chapters I sought to demonstrate how literary studies can turn into a more methodologically plural cultural studies, taking into account the history of medicine and psychiatry, gender and queer studies, in more well-founded ways. Human sexuality can be discussed from a variety of disciplinary vantages, and to achieve a fuller understanding of it, it is imperative that one try to combine various approaches in a study that raises both literary and socio-cultural issues, especially in an era where dominant discourses were shifting, and where class-related and political biases may have restrained our vision of how discourses were rupturing.

In Chapter 2, I tried to explain why the Russian literature of the nineteenth century largely failed to produce a discourse of the sexual and the erotic, perhaps because of its very success in grafting forms from the West into Russian horizons of expectation. The writers we are used to calling "advocates of humanity" often presented sex and corporeality as something trivial, obscene, and revolting. I have claimed that, in fact, there were two major authorial strategies of dealing with erotic themes: silencing and burlesquing / turning into a grotesque available to Russian literati, not often attended to by the world literature approach that has limited

our optic on the Russian canon to that "humanistic" literature—"limited" that canon, to be sure, to some very great writing, but ignoring alternatives, some of which I recoup above. Both traditions to which I refer have, in addition, been intertwined with the tradition of Russian utopian thinking.

At the same time, I argued that there was emerging in Russia's early modern period a third strategy that helped form a counter-tradition of anti-utopianism, in which eroticism and carnality are treated in a non-pathologizing fashion—a tradition ranging from Pushkin through Leskov to Brodsky. In the Silver Age (1890–1921), I believe that all these tendencies and strategies crystallized and clashed between themselves and with popular culture's representations to produce sexual and erotic discourses of the Russian version of modernity. Crucially, I am arguing for "modernity" to refer to a horizon of expectations of discourses (perhaps much like a Foucauldian episteme), rather than any specific stylistic innovation. Rather, the Russian writers I trace as modern (like Georgii Ivanov, rather than Ivan Bunin) are noteworthy for innovating within the traditions.

Socio-politically, this period, as I have argued, can be characterized by the emergent intense interaction between the religious, mostly sectarian common folk / *narod* on the one side and the upper classes and intelligentsia on the other. This happened for the first time in Russia's history and brought about, to use a Bachelard/Foucault term, an *epistemological rupture*. This *social* confrontation forced, I believe, a confrontation of the elite and the Orthodox Church with the discourses of sexuality still present in indigenous forms in the *narod*, while largely absent from elite and official discourses.

At the same time, against the pervasive background of Orthodox culture and the lacunae in discourse predicated on it, both intellectuals of the upper classes and sectarians of peasantry seemed to be obsessed with the same *idée fixe*: how to overcome the body, which was supposedly stifling the spirit. Almost everyone's focus was on the nastiness of sexual intercourse and the urgent need to find some other method for "increasing and multiplying." However, as I have pointed out, certain writings of such authors as Vasilii Rozanov, Fyodor Sologub, and Aleksandr Kuprin provided a powerful discursive alternative to such dominant views—and may have been banished from the canon as that kind of opposition. Later, after the 1917 Revolution, their ideas were not forgotten, but, one could argue in detail, absorbed by such anti-utopian writers inside the Soviet Union as Yevgenii Zamyatin, Isaac Babel, Mikhail Bulgakov and Andrei

Platonov, as well as such émigré authors as Georgii Ivanov and Vladimir Nabokov.

In each of my chapters I have taken up contemporaneous discourses from medicine, law, and religion, using them as keys to specific silences or moments of burlesque in Russian literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through them, I sought to recover the authors' attempts to take up or evade discourses of sexuality. Their novelistic or poetic representations have thus been opened up as keys to their social diagnosis—to their "realistic" vision of the Russian situation, expressed in its own voice, and with its own claim to challenging readers to modernize or not.

Although a full-fledged comparison between Western and Russian discourses of sexualities were not on my agenda for this study, I have occasionally used parallel passages from classic modernist fiction from the Anglophone countries of the West to point up the differences in an emerging discourse of modernity that did not follow the conventions of Western modernism. The monograph was thus meant to be both interdisciplinary and, to a certain extent, comparative/cross-cultural. It will be of interest to scholars from various disciplines—from sociology to the history of medicine, from cultural studies to philosophy—who are interested in the Russian history of ideas as a point of comparison for the reception of major Western intellectual trends in the era. Arguably, attitudes to the carnal and the corporeal, to sexualities and eroticism could be important litmus tests to discern differences and similarities between Russian cultural phenomena and European ones that often bear the same name (e.g., Symbolism, Expressionism, decadence, Neoromanticism), and to argue the Russian variants as original cultural products, not as derivative from the West, although responding to it.

This study has, therefore, sought to promote a more balanced, pluralistic, not Eurocentric, view of Russia's intellectual and cultural history, without either exoticizing Russian culture or westernizing it via applying readymade theoretical models. The author hopes that this text will serve as a contribution to what Foucault would have called the "biohistory" of Russia and its literary and cultural discourses in coping with modernity, in which special attention is paid to the carnal and the corporeal as one of the most important aspects of human existence as that of a living species.

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